

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

FIVE CENTS

No. 57

NED NEWTON or The Fortunes of a New York Bootblack



BY
HORATIO ALGER, JR.

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NED NEWTON;

OR,

The Fortunes of a New York Bootblack.

BY HORATIO ALGER, JR.

CHAPTER I.

NED THE BOOTBLACK.

"Shine your boots! I'll shine 'em up so you'll see your face in 'em!"

The speaker was a stout, healthy-looking boy of fifteen, with a full face expressive of fun and good-nature. His clothes were not of fashionable cut, and it would require a vigorous stretch of the imagination to call him a dude. The persons to whom he addressed himself were a gentleman and a boy who were descending the steps of the Astor House. The boy was showily dressed, and wore a look of importance, as if he placed a high estimate upon himself.

"I think, father, I'll have my boots blacked," said the boy.

"Very well, Eustace. Tell the boy to make haste."

"Here, boy, give me a shine, and see that you do it up in short order," said Eustace, addressing the bootblack, in a tone of authority.

"Yes, general!" answered the bootblack, with a comical look of deference.

"What do you mean by calling me general?" asked Eustace, in rather a suspicious tone.

"Oh, I only meant you're a tiptopper," answered Ned, who was by this time on his knees, hard at work.

"All right, Johnny!" said Eustace. "Do you make much money?" he inquired, condescendingly.

"I haven't got a very big bank account," answered Ned. "Times is hard, and I expect I shall have to give up my house on Fifth Avenue, if business doesn't improve."

"I don't believe you ever saw Fifth Avenue," said Eustace, contemptuously. He was not a boy to relish a joke, and was altogether deficient in a sense of humor. "More likely you live at the Five Points."

"Do you live on Fifth Avenue?" asked Ned.

"N—no," answered Eustace, reluctantly, "but I have a friend living there. I live in Brooklyn. How long have you been a bootblack?"

"For three years."

"Do you like the business?"

"No, I don't, but I have to support my mother."

"It's a dirty business! Why don't you sell papers?"

"Because I can't make as much money. In this business all I get is clear profit, outside the money I spend for blacking. Newsboys are apt to get 'stuck' buying more

papers than they can sell, and it doesn't take many left over to wipe out all the profit on the rest."

"Well, perhaps you're right. It's a very good thing for a boy like you to have some such way of earning a living."

"I don't mean to black boots always," said Ned, quickly. "I don't like the business, but it's better than loafing."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. Some day you may rise to be a waiter, or a laborer of some kind."

"I shouldn't be satisfied with that."

"You wouldn't! What do you want then?" asked Eustace, curiously.

"I mean to be a business man."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Eustace, in amusement. "Why, I'm going to be a business man."

Ned smiled queerly.

"I guess there'll be room for both of us," he said.

Eustace laughed—a derisive laugh that provoked Ned more than any words would have done.

"When you are a prosperous business man, call and tell me," he said. "My name is Eustace Simmons, and I live on Clinton Street, Brooklyn Heights."

"Simmons!" repeated Ned, thoughtfully.

"Yes! Do you know the name?"

"My mother's name was Simmons before she married. I was thinking we might be relations."

The face of the young aristocrat darkened perceptibly.

"Do you mean to insult me?" he demanded, haughtily.

"I don't care to claim relationship," said Ned, proudly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say."

He rapped on the box to show that the job was concluded.

"What do you ask for a shine?" asked his young patron, putting his hand reluctantly into his pocket, for Eustace Simmons never paid away money, even in the smallest sums, willingly.

"Only a nickel, though some customers pay me a dime."

"I've only got four cents. Will that do?"

Ned's lip curled. He saw that it was only an excuse to save a penny, conjecturing, what was the truth, that Eustace had more money in his pocket.

"Pay me whatever you can afford," he said, dryly.

This touched Eustace in his pride.

"Oh, I can afford to pay a dollar, as far as that goes," he said, hastily.

"Thank you; it isn't often I get so much as that."

Eustace stared at the bootblack indignantly.

"Look here!" he said, "you needn't think I'm going to pay you anything like that."

"I don't expect it."

"Can you change this quarter?"

"I guess I can. I didn't deposit my money in the bank yesterday."

He drew from the pocket of his ragged vest four nickels, which he handed to the young dude.

"Call again," he said; but Eustace walked away without answering.

"That's the most ridiculous boy I ever met!" he said, to his father, as they walked down Broadway. "Did you hear the way he talked?"

"No, Eustace, I was busily engaged in reading the morning paper."

"He tried to make out a relationship with me."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Simmons, looking surprised.

"He said his mother's maiden name was Simmons."

Mr. Simmons looked thoughtful.

"Did he say what his name was?"

"No, what does that matter?"

"Oh, nothing!" answered the father, hastily.

To himself he said: "Can it be that this is the son of my cousin, Hester Simmons? It would be very strange. But I mustn't breathe a word of this to Eustace. If it were so, and Aunt Eunice should hear of it, it might imperil the interests of my family. The old lady always liked Hester, and would welcome an opportunity of helping her. Aunt Eunice must be worth two hundred thousand dollars, and, if things go right, it will all come to me and mine. I wish it might be soon," he sighed, "for it strains me to the utmost to keep up my present style of living, though neither Eustace nor his mother expect it."

"How came the boy to say his mother's name was Simmons?" asked the father, turning to Eustace.

"He asked my name, and the word Simmons seemed to strike him."

"There are many persons of that name, and there is no likelihood that we are related."

"Of course not, father. It's disgraceful merely to think that we are related to a bootblack."

"Just so, my son. If you meet the boy again don't have anything to say on this subject. And don't mention my first name!"

"Certainly not, father!" answered Eustace, but he couldn't help thinking his father's request a strange one.

Though a resident of Brooklyn, Mr. Simmons had a place of business on Fulton Street, New York, only a short distance from Nassau Street. Hither the two directed their steps.

A stout, good-looking elderly gentleman, standing by, chanced to overhear the latter part of the conversation between Ned and his customer. When the latter had departed, he said: "You may give me a shine, my boy."

Ned hurried to his new task with alacrity. He did not like his business, but as long as he followed it he tried to make it as profitable as possible.

"Your last customer wasn't very liberal," said the gentleman, with an amused smile.

"No," answered Ned, disdainfully. "He wanted to put me off with four cents."

"Would you have taken it?"

"Yes, sir; I told him I would take it if that was all he could afford to pay."

"Do you live at the newsboys' lodge?" pursued the gentleman.

"No, sir; I have a mother living, and she and I live on Delancey Street."

"Excuse my saying so, but you look above your business. Are you obliged to black boots for a living?"

"Yes, sir; for the present."

"Couldn't you sell papers? That is neater, and less objectionable."

"I tried it, sir, but I found I couldn't average more than forty cents. By blacking boots I can make five dollars a week, sometimes more."

"Is your mother entirely dependent upon you, then?"

"Yes, sir; she tried to sew for the clothing stores, but sewing gives her the headache. So I told her if she would attend to the housekeeping I would provide the money."

"You must once have been in a better position," said the gentleman, scanning the bright, intellectual face upturned to his.

"We were," said Ned; "my father was an actor."

"An actor!" repeated the gentleman, in surprise. "What is your name?"

"Ned Newton."

"And was your father Richard Newton, the comedian?"

"Yes, sir. Did you ever see him act?" asked Ned, eagerly.

"Many times. He was a very clever actor."

"So I have heard," said Ned, his face glowing with pride.

"I suppose your father is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is sad! Were you and your mother left destitute?"

"Father left a small sum of money behind him, but it soon went, and then I was taken from school, and had to earn a living for mother and myself."

"How old were you then?"

"Ten years old!"

"Bless me! And obliged to earn a living at that tender age! Why don't you try to get into a store or office?"

"No one would hire me with these soiled clothes; and even if I could get a place, I couldn't accept it, for a beginner seldom gets more than three dollars a week. Mother and I find it hard to get along on five dollars a week. We should starve on three."

"How much rent do you pay?"

"Five dollars a month."

"That leaves you only three dollars and a half a week for meals."

"Yes, sir."

"I am glad to have talked with you, my boy. But I must not keep you from your business. Let me see, have I paid you?"

"No sir, not yet."

"Suppose I have only four cents?"

"I will take it from you, sir, for you have talked to me like a friend."

"Still, my boy, business is business, and I should not act like a friend if I tried to beat you down from your regular price."

The gentleman took a wallet from his pocket and drew from it a five-dollar bill, which he handed to Ned.

"I am afraid I can't change it, sir," said Ned. "I don't often carry so much money with me. I am afraid you take me for a banker."

"Then, if you can't change it, I suppose I shall have to let you keep the whole," answered the gentleman, with a pleasant smile.

"Do you mean that, sir?" asked Ned, almost breathless with surprise.

"Quite so."

"How can I thank you, sir? You are very generous."

"I ought to be, for God has prospered me."

With these words the gentleman buttoned up his coat and walked off, with a nod and a pleasant smile, leaving Ned a very happy boy.

CHAPTER II.

ONE OF NED'S NEIGHBORS.

The house in Delancey Street where Ned and his mother made their home was not a brownstone house, and looked very little like the elegant mansions on Fifth Avenue and the intersecting streets. It resembled rather a dilapidated factory in its general dingy and shabby appearance. It certainly was not the choice of Ned or his mother to live in such a place, but rents were cheap, and they were able to obtain a couple of rooms for five dollars a month.

Mrs. Newton, dressed in a faded calico and looking far from strong, was reclining on a lounge—a piece of furniture which Ned had picked up cheap on the Bowery after a lucky day, somewhat like the present. Here Ned slept at night. His mother's bed was in an inner room. Two or three chairs and a cheap bureau completed the list of furniture. A couple of framed pictures, which had been given our hero by an old lady who had employed him on an errand, relieved the otherwise bare appearance of the walls.

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Mrs. Newton's face was sad. She deeply felt her helplessness, and it troubled her much that Ned should be obliged, single-handed, to earn all that was required for the support of both.

"If I were not subject to these headaches," she said, to herself, "I could earn something with my needle. If it were only a dollar a week it would be something, and poor Ned would not be compelled to work so hard. I feel bad to see the poor boy go about in such poor clothes. When he was born I little thought of the poverty and privations we would both have to encounter. And how is it to end? Is his life to be no brighter in the future?"

Mrs. Newton sighed, and gave herself up to reflections by no means cheerful.

In the adjoining room, opening upon the same entry, lived a lady by no means resembling Ned's mother.

Mrs. McCurdy was an Irish washerwoman, of fifty years, whose intemperate habits made her look at least fifteen years older. Her face was red and inflamed and her eyes watery. She wore a lace cap with a flaring border, and a soiled print dress enveloped her ample form. She was sitting in a rocking-chair, rocking to and fro, and was evidently in a discontented frame of mind.

"I wish Madge would come back," she grumbled. "She must have a few pennies by this time, and it's famished I am for a drop of whiskey. I don't believe in drinkin' in general, but I'm that delicate there's nothin' like it to cheer me up."

Mrs. McCurdy certainly was far from delicate in appearance, but she was glad to assume it as an excuse for her frequent potations.

Madge was her niece, a prepossessing little girl, in no way resembling her aunt. She was sent out in all weathers to sell matches, and her earnings were greedily absorbed by Mrs. McCurdy, who did not care to work herself any more than she felt absolutely obliged to do. The result was that their income was always scanty, and much of it went for drink instead of food. Poor Madge often went hungry, and more than once she was saved from suffering by the charity of Ned and his mother, who pitied the poor little girl—she was only ten—not alone for her poverty, but for being obliged to live with such a guardian. She in turn admired and loved her charitable neighbors, and more than once wished that favoring fortune had given her such an aunt as Mrs. Newton.

This morning found Mrs. McCurdy sad, as well as her next-door neighbor, but for a different cause. Both were out of spirits, but not in the same sense.

"Where is that Madge?" said Mrs. McCurdy, impatiently. "Like as not she's playin' in the strate, the young hussy, and neglectin' her business, not thinkin' of her poor aunt who's sufferin' at home. And she that I brought up like my own gal, and tuk care of from the time she was

a babby. Oh, it's a cold world, and there's no one knows it better than Bridget McCurdy!"

The more Mrs. McCurdy thought of it the more thirsty she felt. Yet she had not a penny in the house, and there was no chance of her obtaining any till Madge got home. But a bright thought came to the widow. Her neighbor, Mrs. Newton, was forehanded, and probably could lend her some money, by means of which her craving might be gratified.

No sooner had the thought come into her mind than she arose from her chair with alacrity, and leaving the room, knocked at her neighbor's door.

"Come in!" said Mrs. Newton, in a low voice.

She looked up from the couch on which she was resting, but her face did not brighten as her eyes fell upon her neighbor. She did not admire Mrs. McCurdy's character, nor enjoy her company.

"And how are you the day, Mrs. Newton, ma'am?" inquired the visitor, cordially, as she sank into a chair beside the lounge.

"I am feeling weak, Mrs. McCurdy. Thank you for asking."

"I'm feelin' wake meself, ma'am," said the robust widow. "We're both delicate, if it comes to that, and nather of us fit for hard wurruk."

Sad as she felt, Mrs. Newton was tempted to smile at the thought of the robust widow being delicate, but she suppressed the inclination.

"You look to me very strong, Mrs. McCurdy."

"I'm not, ma'am, though I'm so big like. ^{My} there's days when my gal Madge could knock me over wid a feather. I give you my word."

"Where is Madge this morning?"

"She's out wid de matches, Mrs. Newton; but she don't bring in much, lately. I mistrust she plays, instead of attendin' to business."

"She seems to me like a good, industrious girl."

"I wish she was as good as your bye, Ned. He's always workin' for his mother."

"Ned is a large, strong boy, and Madge is only a little girl. You can't expect so much of her."

"Thru for you, ma'am; but it's hard on her poor aunt—that's me—to be so short of money. Why there's days an' days when I'm that wake from havin' nothin' to ate that I can hardly stand up, much less work at the tub."

Mrs. Newton did not question this statement, though she knew too much of her neighbor to believe it.

"I've had nothin' to ate the day," continued Mrs. McCurdy, "and I'll make bold to ask you if you would thrust me for a quarter, to buy a loaf of bread and a quarter ter of a pound of tay."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. McCurdy, but I have no money to spare."

"I'll pay it to you the first thing after Madge comes in," said Mrs. McCurdy, persuasively. "I'm sure you've got some money in the house."

"Yes, we have to lay it by for the rent, and that comes one day after to-morrow."

"She must have near five dollars!" thought the visitor. "I wonder where she keeps it?"

"I'll pay it back before that," she answered.

"I hope you'll excuse me, but I cannot take any risk. Ned has to work so hard for it, and it is his money."

"All right, ma'am, I won't take no offenses. Now, take my advice, and go to slape; it'll do you good."

Mrs. McCurdy went out of the room; but her mind was busy with a bright scheme. She would wait till Mrs. Newton was asleep, then steal in and search for the rent money.

"There must be near five dollars somewhere," she muttered, her eyes brightening at the prospect.

CHAPTER III.

MADGE, THE MATCH GIRL.

A little match girl was walking down Vesey Street with a small basket of matches hanging on her arm.

"Matches! parlor matches—three for a nickel!" she called, in a childish treble.

But matches seemed slow of sale, and poor Madge, for it was she, looked troubled and careworn.

"I know what Aunt Bridget will say," she murmured, to herself. "I've only taken fifteen cents, and she told me she'd whip me if I didn't bring back fifty."

She turned into an office, for her sales were made chiefly in such places. At a desk sat a cross-looking man. Madge felt instinctively that there was little chance for her there. But she had come in to sell matches, and she would try her luck at any rate.

"Will you buy some matches, sir?" she asked.

The man looked up with a frown.

"What's that?" he asked, surveying the little girl, sternly.

"Would you buy some matches of me, sir? Three packages for a nickel!"

"Get out, you little beggar!" he exclaimed, angrily. "What business have you coming in here?"

"Some gentlemen buy of me," answered Madge, tremulously.

"Then they are fools!" roared the sweet-tempered man. "You're only looking for a chance to steal."

"No, sir; I'm not!" said Madge, indignantly. "It's wicked to steal, and—"

"You're an angel, I suppose," said the man, with a sneer. "Here, John!"

A young man, with a pimply face and small eyes like a ferret, came forward. He was worthy of such a master.

"Get out of here!" he said, roughly.

"I'm going, sir," said Madge, nervously.

But she did not appear to go fast enough to suit her persecutor. He followed her to the door, and gave her a push that upset her and the basket. The packages of matches fell upon the sidewalk in different directions. If John had not been of a brutal and unfeeling disposition, he would have expressed regret for the consequences of his violence. As it was, it seemed to amuse him, for he stood in the doorway and laughed.

"You are real bad," said poor little Madge, crying.

"That'll teach you not to come here again, little gal!" said John. "Serves you right!"

When this happened Ned Newton was just turning the corner, and he witnessed the whole scene. He recognized Madge at once, for as we have already seen, she and her aunt lived in the next room to his mother. Now Ned was a thoroughly manly boy, and his anger was always excited when he saw any act of oppression, even if the victim was a total stranger. Much more in the present case, for he knew how unhappily Madge was situated, and how little sunshine there was in her life.

He ran to the scene of disaster as fast as his legs could carry him, and confronted the young bully with blazing eyes.

"What made you do that?" he demanded.

"Mind your business, young feller, and you won't get hurt!" returned John, contemptuously.

"Come here and help this little girl pick up her matches!" said Ned, in an imperative tone.

"Hello! what's up?" said John, almost struck dumb by what he regarded as unparalleled impudence. "Why, you dirty bootblack, you are about the cheekiest kid I've seen for a year."

"Did you hear what I said? You upset this little girl's matches. Help her pick them up."

"I'll lift you on the end of my boot, you young scoundrel!" retorted John, now thoroughly aroused. "Do you know who I am?"

"I know you're a brute!" answered Ned. "You deserve to be horsewhipped."

John was far from an angel in temper, and the idea of being "sassed," as he expressed it, by a boy of fifteen, and a bootblack at that, was altogether too much for him. He left the doorway and approached Ned Newton, with the intention of demolishing him. Ned was not taken unawares. He stood on guard, and when John clumsily aimed a blow at his head, he dexterously ducked it, and planted a blow in the bully's stomach that stretched him howling on the pavement. Then, like a coward that he was, John began to call "Police!"

Generally a policeman is not on hand when wanted, according to the popular belief, but there was an exception

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in the present instance. From the opposite end of the street came up a blue-coated guardian of the public peace. Fortunately for Ned he had seen the whole.

"Hello! what's this?" he asked, quickening his pace.

"Arrest that boy!" exclaimed John, gathering himself up.

"What has he done?"

"He knocked me down, as you see."

"And what were you doing?" asked the policeman, contemptuously. "You let a boy like that upset you?"

"He took me at a disadvantage," whined John.

Now it chanced that the policeman lived near Ned, and had known him for a long time, so that he was not disposed to judge him harshly.

"Tell me about it, my boy," he said, kindly.

"I will, Mr. Brand. This man pushed Madge out of the door, throwing her down, and spilling her matches, and was standing in the doorway laughing at her, when I came up."

"The gal had no business in our office!" said John, in a surly tone. "The boss told me to turn her out."

"He didn't tell you to throw her over," said Ned, indignantly.

"That boy came up and put in his oar, and pitched into me. He ought to be locked up."

"I didn't touch you until you tried to hit me."

"How is that?" asked the policeman.

"I guess my word is better than a dirty bootblack's. I didn't do any such thing."

"As it happens, I saw the whole affair, and know the boy speaks the truth," said the policeman, quietly.

"It's all true, every word!" said Madge, eagerly.

"Oh, of course!" said John, in a surly tone. "He lies and you will swear to it."

"Do you want this man arrested for his attack upon you?" asked the policeman, turning to Madge.

John turned pale. Though a bully, he was a coward, and for the first time it occurred to him that perhaps he had been unwise in indulging his brutal instinct.

"I didn't mean nothing, little gal," he said, hurriedly. "There's a penny for you."

"I don't want to take any money from you," said Madge.

"I—I'll help you pick up your matches," said John, hurriedly. "I didn't mean to upset you."

Ned and the policeman looked on in quiet enjoyment, while John, his pride quite humbled, stooped over, and began to pick up the scattered bundles of matches, and replace them in the little girl's basket.

When all was finished, the policeman said:

"Let this be a warning to you, young man. You won't get off so easily next time."

"It was all a mistake," muttered John, and he sneaked inside.

"I'd like to wring that bootblack's neck!" he muttered, savagely. "If I can ever do him an ill turn I will."

Madge and Ned parted. About five o'clock in the afternoon Ned went home.

"Mother," he said, "I've been in luck to-day. A gentleman gave me five dollars. I'll put it with the rent money."

He went to the bureau drawer, and opened the wallet in which over four dollars had been carefully stored. But an unpleasant surprise awaited him.

The wallet only contained two silver quarters.

"Mother," he said, quickly, "have you used any of the money in the wallet?"

"No, Ned," answered Mrs. Newton, in surprise. "Why do you ask?"

"Because the bills are missing. Only the two quarters are left."

"Let me see!"

But investigation only showed that Ned was right.

"It must have been stolen, mother. Who has been in here?"

"No one but Mrs. McCurdy."

"She is the very woman to take it. Did you watch her?"

"Yes; she didn't take it in my presence. But now I remember she asked me if I could lend her some money. Of course I declined to do so."

"That explains it. She must have come in later. Did you fall asleep this afternoon?"

"Yes, Ned; she must have come in while I was sleeping on the lounge."

Just then a knock was heard at the door, and Madge entered. She was looking sad and troubled.

"Is anything the matter, Madge?" asked Ned.

"Yes; aunt is lying on the floor drunk, with a quart pot smelling of whiskey beside her."

Ned and his mother exchanged glances. It was clear now where the money had gone.

CHAPTER IV.

DISCOVERING THE THIEF.

"Do you know if your aunt had any money, Madge?" asked Ned.

"I thought she hadn't, for she was complaining this morning that she hadn't a cent in the house."

"She must have had money to buy the whiskey with."

"Yes, and she's got some more. I don't understand where it came from," said the little girl, perplexed.

"How do you know she has more money?"

"Because I saw some bank bills in her hand."

"I'll go down with you," said Ned. "I am sorry to say it, but the money was stolen from our room when mother was asleep. It will be a good chance to recover it while Mrs. McCurdy is under the influence of drink."

Madge was not shocked at this evidence of iniquity on the part of her aunt, for she had lost all respect for her, and knew that she was very unscrupulous.

"I'm sorry, Ned," she said. "You'd better come down. It's a shame for your mother to lose money."

Ned followed the little girl into her aunt's room. There lay Mrs. McCurdy, very red in the face, and breathing heavily. Her hands were stretched out beside her, and in one were clutched three bank bills, as Madge had said.

Ned kneeled down, and detached them from her hand with some difficulty. He put them in his vest pocket.

"Madge," said he, "you'd better come upstairs and take supper with us. Mrs. McCurdy won't be fit to be about for a good while. She's in a stupor and won't miss you."

The match girl's face lighted up with pleasure, for she knew the difference between Mrs. Newton's supper and the dry bread which was in general all she got from her aunt.

"Won't it be too much trouble, Ned?" she asked.

"No, Madge; you can help mother get supper, while I go over to the saloon and find out what money your aunt gave Mr. Brady in exchange for the whiskey."

"Oh, yes, Ned," answered Madge, with alacrity. "I'll do all the work, and your mother can lie on the sofa."

Ned put on his hat, and went over to the saloon.

"What, Ned! Have you come for a drink?" asked Mike Brady, the saloon-keeper, in surprise.

"No, Mr. Brady, I never mean to be one of your customers."

"All right, Ned! I sell liquor, but I don't like to sell it to boys like you; I've got a boy of my own."

"Mrs. McCurdy was over here to-day, wasn't she?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Because she's lying on the floor in her room as drunk as a lord."

Mike Brady laughed.

"Yes, she was over here, and bought a pint of whiskey. I shouldn't wonder if she drank it all."

"What money did she offer you for it?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because we have had some money taken from our room—four one dollar bills."

"I remember now, she paid me a one-dollar bill."

"That proves it."

"But, Ned, I can't give it to you back; I gave her the silver in change for it."

"I don't ask to have it returned, for I've got the other three dollars back again. I found them clutched in her hand."

"Then you're lucky."

"I've been lucky to-day, so I don't mind the missing dollar."

"Will you have her arrested?"

"No, I won't, for Madge's sake; I wish she had a better home."

"Thru for you, my boy. It's a poor home the little gal has."

Ned remained to chat a while, for Mike had a son who sold papers, and the two boys were intimate. When he returned, the supper table was spread, and Madge was toasting bread at the stove and steeping the tea. Ned surveyed the preparations with satisfaction.

"Can you cook steak, Madge?" he asked.

"I might," she answered, doubtfully, "only aunt never buys any."

"She can't spare money from the drink, I suppose. Well, Madge, I've been lucky to-day, in spite of losing the dollar, and I'll go to the butcher's and buy some steak, and I'll cook it myself."

"I'll cook it, Ned," said his mother.

"Won't it be too much trouble, mother?"

"No," answered Mrs. Newton, with a smile. "I confess I should enjoy some steak, myself, and I can probably cook it better than you. You'd better buy some potatoes, too, and we will have a supper fit for a king."

"All right, mother! I'll be back in a jiffy. I don't mind saying that I'm as hungry as a bear, and Madge there hasn't had anything to eat since morning."

The supper was delayed half an hour, but all felt repaid when the appetizing odor of the steak—Ned had been extravagant enough to indulge in sirloin—pervaded the room.

"Oh, ain't it—goluptious!" exclaimed Madge, in ecstasy. "If I am ever rich, I'll have beefsteak and potatoes and toast every day."

Meanwhile Mrs. McCurdy's stupor had partially passed off.

She turned over on her side, and her glance fell on the quart measure. She eagerly put it to her lips, but only a few drops remained.

"Shure, and I must have drunk it all!" she said; "and it's aslape I've been."

She looked toward the window, and saw that it was getting dark.

"Where's Madge?" she muttered. "She ought to have been here before this time. I—I wish I had more whiskey."

That reminded her of the money she had remaining. She looked hastily at the hand in which, as she remembered, she had clutched the bills; but there were none to be seen.

BRAVE AND BOLD.

"Somebody must have robbed me," muttered the old woman, indignantly.

The thought had made her very angry. It was rather a curious circumstance that her own theft did not strike her in the same light as the theft from her.

"It must be Madge!" she exclaimed, with sudden conviction. "She's been home, and robbed her poor aunt. Where is she, I wonder? I'll break her neck if I catch her."

Mrs. McCurdy staggered to her feet, and going out into the hall, was drawn by the appetizing odor of the hot supper to Mrs. Newton's door, which was slightly ajar. She went toward it, opened it wider, and with speechless indignation saw Madge sitting at the supper table, evidently enjoying herself highly.

CHAPTER V.

THE SETTLING OF MRS. McCURDY.

"Well, if ever I see the like!" gasped Mrs. McCurdy, quite overcome with amazement. "What are you doin' here, you young trollop?" she continued, shaking her finger at Madge.

Mrs. McCurdy's visit made a mild sensation. Madge gazed at her aunt in dumb amazement, holding her fork suspended midway between her mouth and her plate.

"Here you are, feastin' and carousin', while you poor aunt——"

"Lay drunk on the floor!" said Ned, finishing out the sentence.

"Who says I'm drunk?" demanded Mrs. McCurdy, defiantly.

"I say so!" answered Ned, firmly.

"I only tuk the laste drop to stiddy me nerves," said the widow, in self-defense.

"You must have a great many nerves that need steadyng, that's all I have to say. Mr. Brady says you bought a pint of whiskey, and there was only a drop left in the measure."

"Did he say that now?"

"Yes, he did."

"Thin somebody must have come in and drunk the most of it. I only tuk a small swaller. I believe it's Madge that served her poor aunt that same thrick!" and again the forefinger was pointed at the poor girl.

Ned laughed, and even Mrs. Newton smiled at this ridiculous charge, but Mrs. McCurdy grew angry.

"Come right home, you trollop," she cried. "Do you think I'll let you ate the fat of the land, while your poor aunt hasn't had a bite nor a sup the day?"

Madge, reluctantly enough, made a motion to arise.

"And you stole me money, too!" continued Bridget McCurdy. "You took advantage of my bein' aslape to rob me of my hard earnin's."

This was too much for Ned.

"Where did you get the money you spent for whiskey?" he asked.

"Where did I get it?" repeated Mrs. McCurdy, showing momentary confusion. "Shure I earned it at the washtub, though I wasn't able on account of my bein' delicate like."

"That is not true. You took it from a wallet in the upper drawer of my mother's bureau. It was money that we had laid aside for the rent."

"Hear to him now!" exclaimed the visitor, raising both hands in protestation. "He wants to say that Bridget McCurdy is a thafe!"

"That's just what I do say, Mrs. McCurdy. You took four one-dollar bills. One of these you paid to Mr. Brady for whiskey, and the other three I found clutched in your hand. I could call in the policeman, and hand you over to him for that."

"It's hard on an honest woman to be called a thafe, and be threatened wid the perlice!" moaned the widow, breaking into maudlin tears, "and my own niece goin' ag'inst me, too."

"Let Madge alone, and I'll overlook your theft this time!" said Ned, "but if you ill-treat her, I'll send at once for a policeman."

"I haven't had a bite to-day," said Mrs. McCurdy, dismally. "I'm so wake wid fastin' that I can't stand."

"Ned," said Mrs. Newton, whose sympathies were easily excited, though she knew the object to be unworthy, "you'd better cut a piece of meat for Mrs. McCurdy."

"As a reward of merit?" inquired Ned, with a smile. "Well, sit up here, Mrs. McCurdy, and we'll see if we can strengthen you so that you can stand."

The visitor needed no second invitation. She seated herself in the chair Ned placed for her, and partook with a hearty zest of the food set before her. Her appetite being satisfied, she became unusually amiable, so that Ned and his mother ceased to feel any anxiety about her treatment of Madge.

When supper was over and their guests had left the room, Ned inquired: "Have you any relatives, mother?"

"Why do you ask, Ned?"

"Because I blacked the boots of a boy named Simmons this morning."

"How old was he?" inquired Mrs. Newton, with interest.

"About my age."

"Did you hear his name?"

"His father called him Eustace."

"Was his father with him, then?"

"Yes, mother."

"What was his appearance?"

Ned described Mr. Simmons as well as he could.

"He is my cousin, Ned," said Mrs. Newton, quietly.

"And the boy who put on such airs is related to me, then?"

"Yes, he is a second cousin."

Ned whistled.

"I wish I had known that," he said. "Just in fun I suggested that we were related, and he seemed very much disgusted."

"I suppose his father is a rich man. He had a small fortune, and the lady he married brought him more. He was always proud, and his wife also."

"The son seems to inherit a share from both. I don't like him much. He looks as if he owned half of New York."

"Yet at one time my prospects were better than his," said Mrs. Newton, thoughtfully.

"What changed them, mother?"

"My marriage to your father. My father and mother died when I was quite young, and I was adopted by Aunt Eunice, who is very wealthy. I was looked upon as likely to inherit all her money, but she disapproved of my marriage with your father."

"What was her objection?"

"She objected to my marrying an actor. She was a strict church member, and this prejudiced her. She required me to give up my engagement on pain of her displeasure."

"And you wouldn't? Mother, I like your spunk."

Mrs. Newton smiled.

"Still," she said, "it proved serious for me, as your aunt was implacable. She would have nothing to say to me after the wedding, and would not receive your father."

"Have you never seen her since? Is she still living?"

"Yes, I learned recently that she still lived; indeed, I saw her one day in a cab in Brooklyn."

"Who will inherit her money, probably?"

"My cousin: the man you saw this morning."

"I am sorry for that. I wish it were somebody else. That boy will put on more airs than ever when he gets hold of her money."

Here the conversation closed.

The next day Ned was sent on an errand to the Gilsey House at the corner of Twenty-ninth Street and Broadway.

As he passed the door of the reading-room he chanced to look in. Seated in a chair at the writing table, engaged in reading a daily paper, was an elderly gentleman. On the chair behind him hung a valuable overcoat. A young man who had been sitting near had arisen from his seat, and with catlike steps approached the reader. His attention was directed to the coat, which evidently excited his cupidity. There was no other person in the reading-room, and he thought himself unobserved as he began

cautiously to remove the coat from the back of the chair, preparatory to appropriating it. The old gentleman was so absorbed in his paper that he was not at all aware of what was going on.

"I will interfere with his little game," said Ned, to himself, and he stood where, unobserved, he could see all that was going on.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INVITATION TO LUNCH.

The task of the coat thief was an easy one. The old gentleman was absorbed in reading an article which very much interested him and he was utterly unconscious of the plot to relieve him of his property.

The thief felt it necessary to accomplish his task as quickly as possible, for at any moment some one might enter the reading-room, and interfere with him. He succeeded, and with a satisfied smile, withdrew softly from the room. It was his intention to pass through the front entrance, hail a Broadway horsecar, and ride swiftly away.

But at the door he met a boy of whom he took little notice, till Ned, for it was he, grasped him firmly by the arm, and said:

"Carry back that coat!"

"What do you mean, you young whipper-snapper?" said the thief, in a low voice of concentrated rage. "Out of my path!"

He tried to shake off Ned's grasp, but found he had undertaken a bigger job than he had bargained for. Ned was strong and muscular, and held on.

The young man with an angry light in his eyes raised his foot to kick the boy who had barred his progress. If Ned had not stepped nimbly aside he would have been seriously hurt.

Just then the two attracted the attention of one of the hotel servants, who hurried up.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, looking from one to the other.

"This boy has insulted me!" said the thief, hastily. "Hold him while I call a policeman!"

This bold ruse nearly succeeded. The young man was so well dressed that the servant for a moment thought him a guest of the hotel.

He grasped Ned by the arm, crying: "Let go the gentleman!"

But Ned clung to the thief all the more firmly.

"Gentleman!" he repeated; "the coat on his arm is stolen from the gentleman in the reading-room."

The servant looked the picture of amazement.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"Ask the old gentleman."

But he didn't need to ask the question. With an oath the thief dropped the coat, and before the servant had

recovered from his surprise had covered the distance to the door, and dashed out and around the corner.

Picking up the coat, the attendant, followed by Ned, took it into the reading-room.

"Is this your coat?" he asked of the old gentleman, who looked up in a bewildered way.

"Why, yes," answered the reader. "Where did you find it?"

"You came near losing it. Did you notice a young man in the room with you?"

"Yes, I believe I saw him."

"He was going out of the room with your coat on his arm, when this boy, who had been watching his proceedings, seized him at the door, and held him till I came."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "My boy, I am very much indebted to you."

"You are very welcome, sir," said Ned, making a motion to leave.

"Stop, I wish to speak to you, if you are not in haste."

"Oh no, sir; my time isn't valuable," said Ned, with a smile.

"The last five minutes have been—to me. That overcoat cost me seventy dollars."

Ned looked amazed. He had bought a ready-made overcoat a year before for five dollars. He could not conceive of any overcoat costing so much as seventy dollars.

"Perhaps it isn't worth it, but I had it made of the best materials, by a fashionable tailor. The enterprising young man who came so near depriving me of it would have been in luck."

Ned regarded the gentleman with the respect which wealth is very apt to inspire. He felt that a man who could afford to buy a seventy-dollar overcoat must, indeed, have plenty of money.

"I don't buy my clothes at your tailor's," he said, with a glance at his faded and worn suit.

"My boy, fortunately a boy's merit does not depend on his clothes," said the old gentleman, kindly. "I suppose you have a better suit?"

"No, sir; my income is not very large, and I have to support my mother."

"Good boy, good boy! You couldn't do better. What do you do for a living?"

Ned looked embarrassed. He didn't like to confess that he blacked boots, for he was not proud of the business, but still he felt that he had no reason to be ashamed of an honest trade.

"I black boots," he replied, with an effort. "I would prefer to sell papers, but I couldn't make as much money."

"You are none the worse for it, my boy. But I see that it is about my time for lunch. Will you accompany me to my house, and lunch with me?"

Ned looked to see if the gentleman were joking, but he perceived that he was in earnest. He didn't quite feel that he could afford the time, for he had not earned much since morning. But perhaps it might not be far.

"Where do you live, sir?" he asked.

"On Madison Avenue."

"I am afraid my dress is not good enough to visit there."

"Perhaps we can remedy that," said the old gentleman, smiling.

"Thank you, sir; if you don't mind walking with me, I will go."

They turned down Twenty-ninth Street, crossed Fifth Avenue, and reaching Madison Avenue, which is nearly as handsome and quite as aristocratic, walked up three blocks, and stopped in front of a handsome brownstone front.

"Here we are!" said his elderly companion. He walked up the steps, and rang the bell. The door was opened by an elderly woman, who regarded Ned with some curiosity.

"Jane, you may set an extra chair at the table. I have brought this young gentleman home to lunch. Is Fred at home?"

"Yes, sir; I believe he is in his room."

"Call him down into the library."

"Very well, sir!"

"Follow me upstairs, Edward," said the old gentleman, who had inquired Ned's name.

"Thank you, sir."

Ned glanced furtively at the handsome staircase, the luxurious carpets, and caught glimpses of an elegant parlor through the half-opened door.

"I wonder if I am dreaming," he thought.

The library into which his companion ushered him was equally handsome. Elegant bookcases lined the sides of the room. There were oil paintings on the walls, and many little knick-knacks which were new to Ned, were scattered about.

"Sit down there, Edward," said the old gentleman, pointing to a plush-covered easy-chair. Ned sank into its luxurious depths, and experienced a new sensation. He had not supposed any chair could be so soft and comfortable.

"I have a grandson about your age," continued his host. "I have sent for him to meet you."

"I hope he won't be like Eustace Simmons," thought Ned. On the whole he thought it likely that he would. A boy living in such a house as this would hardly care to greet another whose poverty compelled him to black boots. Not that Ned thought the less of himself on that account. But he knew the world judged differently.

"He had not long to wait. A quick step was heard out-

side, and a boy entered through the open door. A pleasant-faced boy of very nearly the same size as Ned. As he entered he looked inquisitively at the young visitor.

"Edward," said the old gentleman, "this is my grandson, Fred Stanhope. Fred, this is Edward Newton, a boy who has rendered me this morning a valuable service."

"Then I am glad to see him," said Fred, with a cordial smile, holding out his hand to the young visitor. Did he save your life, grandpa?" he asked, with a mirthful look at Ned.

"Not exactly, but he saved my overcoat."

"Tell me about it," said Fred, looking curious. "You have done grandpa an important service," he added, turning to our hero, "for he could not afford to buy a new one!"

"Just my case!" returned Ned, responding to the other's fun.

CHAPTER VII.

NED'S TRANSFORMATION.

"You two boys appear to be making fun of me," said the old gentleman, pleasantly. "However, I will gratify Fred's curiosity, and explain how we became acquainted."

He briefly told the story of the thief's attempt to rob him.

"So," continued Mr. Stanhope, "I invited Edward home to lunch."

"I don't look fit to sit down at your table," said Ned, noting the contrast between his soiled apparel and Fred's handsome suit.

"We shan't mind that," said Fred, promptly.

"By the way, won't you two boys stand up together? I want to see how you compare in size."

The boys stood up, back to back. Of the two, Ned was perhaps half an inch taller.

"Fred, I am quite sure a suit of yours would fit Edward. If he won't be too proud to accept the gift, you may give him one of your suits. As it will be twenty minutes before lunch, suppose you attend to it now."

"But perhaps Fred cannot spare a suit," suggested Ned.

"Oh, I've got a large supply—more than I need. Come up to my room, and I will fit you out."

"How different he is from Eustace," thought Ned, as he followed his new friend up to a handsomely furnished chamber on the third floor. It was a spacious room, fitted up both as a chamber and study. In one corner near the window was a library table, covered with schoolbooks.

"Here is my wardrobe," said Fred, going to a large closet, and throwing it open. Clothing was hung all around in large variety.

"What a lot of clothes you have!" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes; I've got more than I need, as grandpa says. Take your choice."

This seemed to Ned a very liberal proposal, but he did not think it would be right to construe it too literally. He therefore selected a suit half worn, probably the least valuable in the closet.

"I will take that, if I may," he said.

"That!" returned Fred, in surprise. "Why, that is the worst suit here. I used it in the country when I went out hunting last fall. I don't think much of your taste."

"That is the reason I selected it. I didn't want to take one of your best suits."

"Well, you may have it, for I am sure never to wear it again, but you must have a better suit, too. Here is one," taking down a nearly new and handsome suit of Scotch cloth. "I'll send for one of the servants, and get him to pack them."

"Are you sure you can spare both, Fred?"

"Certainly; I can have more when I like."

"You are very kind. If you like, I will put one of them on, and have my old suit wrapped up with the other."

"That's a good idea! Put on the handsome one; I want you to present a good appearance. And, by the way, you may as well put on one of my shirts, and a clean collar and a new necktie."

In fifteen minutes Ned was so transformed that he hardly knew himself when he looked in the glass.

"Clothes certainly do make a difference," said Fred, smiling.

When the two boys entered the library Mr. Stanhope looked up.

"Really," he said, "here is a wonderful change. Fred, which one of your fashionable friends is this?"

"You are both very kind to me," said Ned, earnestly.

"And so we ought to be, my boy—we who have been so much more favored by fortune. Now we will walk out to lunch."

When lunch was over, Ned took his bundle, and, with a kind invitation to repeat his visit, left the house.

"This has been a lucky morning," he thought. "What will mother think when she sees me dressed up like this?"

He got into a Madison Avenue car to ride downtown. He was hardly settled, when to his astonishment Eustace Simmons entered and took the seat just opposite. They were the only passengers in the car.

Eustace stared hard at Ned. His face seemed familiar, but he did not for a moment associate this richly dressed boy with the humble bootblack of the Astor House.

"I think I have met you before," he said, politely, "but I can't recall your name."

Ned smiled.

"My name is Edward Newton," he replied. "I believe we have met."

"Where was it? At the Livingston party? Do you live in Brooklyn?"

"No, I am not acquainted with the Livingstons. We met a few days since in front of the Astor House."

"Well, I declare! You don't mean to say you are the boy who gave me a shiné?"

"And to whom you wanted to pay four cents. Yes."

"How on earth do you manage to dress like this? Why, you are dressed as well as I am."

In reality Ned was dressed better.

Ned felt in a tantalizing mood.

"I don't wear my best clothes when I am at work," he said.

"But this suit must have come from a fashionable tailor's," continued Eustace, puzzled.

"It did."

"Who made it?"

Ned was able to answer this question, for Fred had told him.

"I don't understand how a boy in your business can dress in that way," said Eustace.

"I sometimes feel surprised at it myself," remarked Ned, with a smile.

"Have you got any relatives?" asked Eustace, abruptly.

"I have a mother, but no brothers or sisters," answered Ned.

"What business was your father in?" asked Eustace, uneasily.

"He was an actor—and a very good one, I have been told."

"What was his name?"

"Richard Newton."

Eustace was evidently worried. He and his father had talked over the matter of relationship, and he knew now that Ned was his second cousin. He did not relish the idea of having a bootblack for a cousin, but more than all he realized the danger of his Aunt Eunice learning that Ned and his mother were living. She might take it into her head to leave half her large fortune to the poor widow—her once favorite niece, Hester. If only they would leave New York, the danger would be much lessened.

"I wonder you don't move out West," said Eustace.

"Why?" asked Ned, surprised.

"Because it is much easier to make a good living out there."

"I don't feel sure of that."

"I do," said Eustace, confidently.

"Where would you recommend me to go?"

"The farther west the better—say Iowa or Minnesota."

"Thank you for the advice. I will think it over."

"I wish to Heaven he would!" thought Eustace.

Here two lady passengers entered the stage and the two boys stopped conversing.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS EUNICE SIMMONS.

In a little, plain house in an unfashionable part of Brooklyn, lived Miss Eunice Simmons. She was a small, thin old lady of seventy-two, but with an uncommon amount of strength and vitality for one of her age. Her eye was keen and piercing, and she looked like a woman with a mind and will of her own. She lived alone, except for a humble companion, a woman of middle-age, a Scotch woman, very plain in appearance, named Jane Barclay, who was thoroughly devoted to her mistress.

Probably the house in which Miss Simmons lived would not have fetched three thousand dollars if put upon the market, and the furniture was of the plainest, yet the occupant was easily worth quarter of a million of dollars, which she insisted upon managing herself, much to the disappointment of her nephew, Elias Simmons.

Of late, matters had been going ill with Elias Simmons. He had ventured into Wall Street speculation and got shorn. He needed to raise a considerable sum of money before the fifteenth of the month, and decided to call upon his aunt, though he dreaded to do so.

Miss Simmons was knitting by the fire in her plain sitting-room when her companion, Jane Barclay, said suddenly: "Miss Simmons, your nephew is coming up the street. I think he is going to call."

"You can admit him, Jane," said the old lady, quietly.

Directly afterward the bell rang, and presently Jane, who had gone to the door, reappeared, followed by Elias Simmons.

"My dear aunt," he began, his face assuming a look of affectionate interest, "I hope you are well."

"Thank you, Elias," she responded, "I am as well as one could expect at my age."

"My dear aunt, I do wish you would consent to leave this lonely house, and make your home with me. It worries me to think of you alone at your age."

"But I am not alone. My faithful Jane is always at hand."

"Could I have a few minutes' conversation with you alone, aunt?" asked Elias Simmons, after a pause.

"If you desire it, Jane, will you kindly go into the next room?"

"Certainly, ma'am. I have a little work to do in the kitchen."

Jane left the room, and aunt and nephew were alone.

"Aunt Eunice, I have a little favor to ask of you," said Elias, clearing his throat, nervously.

"Proceed, Elias."

"The fact is, my dear aunt, I have a chance to buy a bankrupt stock of goods in my own line, at fifty cents on the dollar. It would be a grand investment, but the party requires cash."

He looked insinuatingly at his aunt, but she continued to knit, her calm face expressing no emotion.

"Don't you think I had better embrace the opportunity, Aunt Eunice?" he asked.

"I don't understand, Elias, why you should consult me on a matter of business," returned the old lady. "You ought to be competent to decide such a question as that yourself."

"I have decided that it is wise, but there is a difficulty."

"Well?"

"The lack of ready money. To come to the point. I have come to ask you to lend me two thousand dollars on—well, say sixty days."

"You must excuse me, Elias, but I know nothing of your business standing. My advice is, that if you can't pay for the goods you leave them alone. Not being in business, I don't care to make any business ventures."

"I thought, Aunt Eunice, that as I was your only relative—"

"Are you sure you are my only relative?" asked the old lady.

"Who else is there?"

"Hester may be living."

"Even if she is, though I think it very improbable, she disgraced the family by marrying a low actor. You said so yourself."

"I may have looked upon the matter too seriously. At any rate, Richard Newton is dead, so I have heard, and Hester may be in distress."

"She, too, is dead, I have been told."

"Who told you so?"

"A—an actor—I forgot his name," stammered Elias.

"If you meet him again, bring him here. I should like to ask him the particulars."

"I will endeavor to find him, aunt."

"I was told she had a child—a boy."

"I know nothing of that, Aunt Eunice. According to my informant, it is not true. If there was a child, it died in infancy."

"Poor Hester! I am afraid I was too hard upon her!" sighed the old lady.

"I think you acted just right, aunt. But don't let us refer to this. You are sure you can't oblige me?"

"I could," said the truthful old lady, "but I do not think it wise to do so."

Bitterly disappointed, Elias Simmons half an hour later left the house. But on the threshold he had a terrible surprise. Just ascending the steps of the house he saw

Ned Newton, the son of his cousin Hester, whose existence he was so afraid his aunt would learn.

"What brings you here?" he asked, abruptly.

CHAPTER IX.

NED'S PRESENCE MAKES A SENSATION.

"Do you live here, Mr. Simmons?" asked Ned, in much surprise.

The merchant was somewhat reassured by this reply. It looked as if Ned was not aware that his mother's wealthy aunt lived in this plain dwelling. If possible, he must not find out.

"No," he answered, after a moment's thought, "I don't live here, but I am acquainted with those who do."

"I have a small bundle for Miss Jane Barclay. Does she live here?"

"Yes," said Mr. Simmons, much relieved. "But how do you happen to have a bundle for her?"

"A boy, employed in a dry goods store on Fulton Street, got me to bring it. He said his mother was sick, and my taking it would give him an hour at home."

"That's all right," said Elias Simmons, briskly. "Give it to me, and I'll take it in to her."

"I think I'd rather give it to Miss Barclay myself," said Ned, cautiously.

"Oh, well!" returned Simmons, good-humoredly. "I'll ring the bell, and she'll come to the door."

Miss Barclay did in fact answer the bell. She regarded Ned in some surprise, looking from him to Mr. Simmons.

"What does this boy wish?" she asked.

"Are you Miss Jane Barclay?" asked Ned.

"Yes."

"Then here is a bundle for you."

"Oh! I see. It is something I bought this forenoon."

"Then it's all right," and Ned turned to go away.

"Stay!" said Mr. Simmons, taking a quarter from his pocket; "let this pay you for your trouble."

"Thank you, sir," said Ned, pocketing the coin.

It gave him a more favorable opinion of Elias Simmons than he had hitherto entertained.

"He is a good deal more liberal than his son," thought our hero.

As Ned disappeared around the corner, Jane Barclay looked after him thoughtfully.

"That boy looks like your cousin Hester," she said.

"Pooh, pooh!" said Elias Simmons, nervously. "I don't see the least resemblance."

"The eyes had the same expression, and the mouth. I am sure Miss Eunice would agree with me."

"Pray don't tell her!" said Mr. Simmons, anxiously. "It would only worry her. You are getting fanciful, Jane Barclay."

"I've got the use of my eyes still, Mr. Simmons," retorted Jane, not altogether pleased. "I tell you there was a wonderful resemblance between that boy and Hester. I wish I had asked his name."

"I am glad you didn't!" thought Elias.

"I heard that Hester had a son."

"He died!" said Elias Simmons, with bold falsehood.

"He would be about the age of this boy, if living," continued Jane.

"But he's dead, I tell you. However, if it will gratify you, I will send this boy here to satisfy you, if I happen to fall in with him again."

"I wish you would!"

"Does Aunt Eunice often refer to Hester?" asked Elias Simmons, anxiously.

"Quite often recently. She is getting old, and has so few relations. She thinks she was unjust to Hester."

"I don't think so. Still, if I hear any news of her I will at once communicate it to my aunt."

"I wonder whether he will," thought Jane Barclay, fixing her eyes thoughtfully on the face of the only nephew.

Just then there was a knock on the window.

"I must go in," said Jane. "Miss Eunice is calling me."

"Bid my aunt good-by. I will call again soon," and Elias Simmons boarded a car that was just passing.

"It was fortunate that I was at hand to head off that young interloper," he reflected, "or that meddlesome woman would have taken the boy into the house, and Aunt Eunice would have learned the truth. That would have upset my kettle of fish. There is very little likelihood of the boy being seen again in this neighborhood. It was a mere chance, his coming to-day."

When Miss Barclay, summoned by the tap on the window, entered the presence of her patroness, she found her in an unusual state of agitation.

"Who was that boy?" she demanded, abruptly.

"A boy with a bundle for me. Here it is."

"Was that all?" returned Miss Simmons, in evident disappointment.

"Yes."

"Is he gone?"

"Yes."

"I—perhaps you will think me fanciful—I fancied he might come from Hester. Did you not see a resemblance?"

"I did. And you saw it, too?"

"At once. He looked like Hester in her earlier days, before the sad trouble separated us——" and the old lady's face softened at the recollection.

"I thought so, too, and mentioned it to your nephew."

"And what did he say?"

"He ridiculed the notion—said he saw no likeness at all."

"He had his reasons, no doubt," said the old lady, dryly.

"However, when I persisted, he said if he should meet the boy again, he would send him over here, so that you could ask him any questions you desired."

"That surprises me. Did he seem to be in earnest?"

"I can't say; perhaps I might misjudge him, for, as you know, I never fancied Elias Simmons."

CHAPTER X.

NED GETS A JOB.

Three days later retribution overtook Bridget McCurdy. She had been imprudent enough to borrow a shawl without leave from the room of a Mrs. Rourke, and was met by Ned in the street under the escort of a policeman, bemoaning herself and her bad luck. A sentence of two months' imprisonment was imposed by the police justice who tried the case, and so, for a time, Mrs. McCurdy was lost to her usual haunts.

Ned carried the news to Madge. Though she had little reason to esteem the woman for whom she slaved, this news was received with something like consternation.

"What will become of me, Ned?" she asked, pitifully.

"Mother says you can live with us. You may have to sell matches for a little while, as our income is small, but you need not go out in the evening."

"Oh, that will be lovely!" said Madge, drying her eyes. "I like your mother ever so much, Ned. She won't beat me, nor send me to bed without my supper."

"Not unless she changes considerably," said Ned, smiling. "She never treats me in that way."

So commenced a new life for the poor orphan match girl. For the first time since she could remember she had enough to eat, and was treated with considerate kindness.

Mrs. Newton allowed her to go out a few hours in the forenoon, but in the afternoon she gave Madge lessons from some books which Ned had formerly used. Madge proved an apt scholar, and Mrs. Newton herself found interest in the benevolent task she had undertaken.

Meanwhile Ned was busily engaged in thinking of the future. He was growing ambitious. It might be the new clothes which he wore that made him sensitive and desirous of escaping from the unpleasant business which necessity had forced him to adopt.

He hunted for something better, but he found the most he could get as an office boy or boy in a store, was four dollars a week, and this would not defray the expenses of their establishment, modest though it was. He didn't say anything to his mother, for it would have troubled her to know that he was working for her in a business that was distasteful to him.

When any other job offered Ned had no scruples about laying aside his box and taking it up.

One morning something extraordinary happened to him.

He had just returned from an errand, and was standing in front of the *Tribune* building, on Printing House Square, when he heard himself called by name.

Looking up, he recognized Elias Simmons, his mother's cousin.

"How are you getting along, my boy?" asked Mr. Simmons.

"Pretty well, sir," answered Ned, considerably surprised at this expression of interest on the part of such a man.

"Are you in the old business?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ought to be doing something better."

"So I think myself, sir."

"Why don't you try to get a place in a store?"

"I have been offered two or three places, but I cannot afford to work for the price offered."

"How much is that?"

"The most I can get is four dollars a week."

"And that doesn't satisfy you?"

"It would if I could live on it, but I have a mother to support."

Mr. Simmons' brow involuntarily contracted. He did not like to hear of this cousin who might share with him his aunt's fortune.

"How would you like to go into my store?" asked Elias Simmons.

"Your store is on Fulton Street, is it not?"

"Yes; it is a furnishing goods store."

"How much would you give me, sir?"

"We have just discharged a boy, and his place is vacant. We paid him four dollars a week. As you have a mother to support, we will pay you six dollars, or a dollar a day. What do you say?"

"I accept thankfully, sir," answered Ned, in gratified surprise. "When do you want me to begin?"

"To-morrow morning. We shall want you at eight o'clock ordinarily. Come at nine to-morrow, as I shall not be there till then."

Ned was overjoyed. He did not suspect that his wily enemy had a plan arranged for getting him into trouble.

The next morning Ned reported for duty at the Fulton Street store. It so happened that he entered at the same time with Mr. Simmons.

"So you are punctual, Edward," said the merchant, with a bland smile. "That is well."

"I hope, sir, I shall be able to give you satisfaction."

"Do your best, and there will be no trouble."

Ned followed Mr. Simmons into the store. There were

three men and a boy of eighteen standing behind the counters. The store was of good size, and well supplied with furnishing goods in all varieties. Ned looked about him complacently. He was glad to be employed in so handsome a store.

"Mr. Kimball," said Mr. Simmons, addressing a man of thirty-five, with black side-whiskers, "you will be kind enough to set this boy to work. He will do errands outside, and any work you think best in the store."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Kimball was head salesman. He glanced at Ned carelessly, and bade him fold up some goods which lay upon the counter.

Somehow Ned got the impression that Mr. Kimball was not disposed to be friendly. That was not altogether pleasant, but he resolved to do his duty.

Presently another boy came around to where he was standing.

"Halloo!" he said, by way of greeting.

"Halloo!" answered Ned, not thinking of anything else to say.

"So you're the new boy."

"I believe so."

"Where did Simmons pick you up?"

"In front of the *Tribune* building."

"What were you doing there?"

"Minding my own business," answered Ned, rather nettled.

"Oh, you're cranky."

Ned smiled.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Two years. I am the nephew of Mr. Kimball, the head salesman. My name is Leon Granville. What's yours?"

Ned gave him the desired information.

"Well, Newton," said Leon, jauntily, "just bear in mind that you are my understrapper. You're to obey me, and be guided by me in all things."

"Mr. Simmons didn't say anything about that," said Ned.

"Didn't he? Well, my uncle will expect it. He is the one who does the managing."

Ned did not reply, but he doubted whether his new friend had any authority for speaking as he did.

"How much do you get a week?" asked Leon, later in the day.

"I am to get six dollars a week."

"What!" ejaculated Leon.

"Six dollars."

"Who told you so?"

"Mr. Simmons."

"You must be mistaken. A new boy like you wouldn't get more than four dollars, and wouldn't earn that."

"I don't know anything about that, but Mr. Simmons promised me six."

"Why, I only get six, and I've been here two years."

Soon after Leon went to his uncle, and had a whispered conference with him. Ned suspected it was about him, as glances were occasionally cast in his direction. As might have been anticipated, Kimball took his nephew's part in the matter, and was indignant at the new boy's good fortune.

Elias Simmons was a crafty man. It was his purpose to make enemies for Ned in the store, and he could have taken no more effectual means than by giving him a large salary at the outset.

Ned was conscious that neither Leon nor the head clerk liked him, but that he was in any danger from this source he did not suspect.

The first day passed off smoothly. Ned was sent out on several errands, to the post office for letters, to a wholesale house for samples, and did miscellaneous work in the store.

CHAPTER XI.

ROSCOE ST. CLAIR.

Ned was glad to find that the store closed at six o'clock. If it had been located on Sixth Avenue or the Bowery it would have been kept open much later, but the portion of New York south of Canal Street is pretty well deserted after six.

In the evening, while walking up Broadway, he heard his name called. Looking around he recognized Roscoe St. Clair, one of the young men employed in the store. St. Clair was effeminate in manner, and inclined to be a dude. He was rather short of stature, not being taller than Ned, and his face, though amiable, was weak.

"Good-evening, Mr. Newton," he said. "Are you out for a promenade?"

"Good-evening, Mr. St. Clair, but don't call me Mr. Newton. I am only a boy as yet. Call me Ned."

"All right! I will be glad to do so if you will permit me. Do you live near by?"

"I live on the east side," Ned answered, vaguely. He did not care to run the risk of a call from any of his business associates, feeling a little sensitive in respect to his humble surroundings.

"I live on Clinton Place, in a lodging house, and take my meals at the restaurants. How do you like your new place?"

"I have hardly been in it long enough to tell. I am afraid I sha'n't like the other boy."

"You mean Leon?"

"Yes."

"I don't like him myself. He's inclined to be sarcastic. He made fun, the other day, of my mustache."

Ned felt inclined to laugh. The few light brown hairs which Mr. St. Clair dignified as a mustache indicated great immaturity, and were not calculated to win admiration.

"He doesn't seem to me a very pleasant boy."

"He puts on plenty of airs, though. He is Mr. Kimball's nephew, and the head clerk favors him more than any of the rest of us."

"Does Mr. Simmons appear to like him?"

"Mr. Simmons is guided by what Kimball tells him. I might tell something against him if I chose."

"What, for instance?"

"I was passing a billiard saloon—one of the low sort on the east side—one night, when I saw Leon come out staggering. He was pretty full. The friend who was with me said that he was there almost every evening playing 'pool for drinks'."

"I am sorry to hear that. If he has a mother and sister they are to be pitied."

"He has no mother, but Mr. Kimball acts as his guardian. I wouldn't tell Kimball, for Leon would deny it, and the head clerk would believe him."

"But who is that approaching us? Isn't it Leon Granville himself?"

"Yes," answered St. Clair, in a tone of surprise.

At this moment Leon caught sight of his two fellow clerks, and slackened his pace.

"Good-evening," said Leon, in a condescending tone. "Are you out for a walk?"

"Yes," answered St. Clair, in a tone of deference, remembering that he was addressing the nephew of the head clerk.

"Are you two fellows acquainted?" he inquired.

"Only since we met in the store," answered Ned.

"I suppose you are out for a walk, too," said St. Clair.

"Yes; I have a headache to-night. I suppose it is because I am too gay. How many parties do you suppose I attended last month?"

"I couldn't guess."

"Eight—all at top-top private houses, too—swell families, living in fine mansions uptown. That makes me feel a little shaky."

Roscoe St. Clair seemed impressed. He was credulous and easily deceived, and really believed what was told him.

"You are lucky to be in with so many fashionable families," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so, but if I were like you and your friend here I should be able to keep better hours."

Ned's eyes twinkled. He saw at once that Leon was a sham.

"You ought to do like me," he said, "refuse half the invitations you receive. I was obliged, last week, to ask

Mrs. Astor to excuse my attending a party, as I had a severe cold."

Leon looked disgusted, and even St. Clair looked amazed.

"Quite likely," said Leon, in an ironical tone.

But just then, happily for Ned's credit, a handsomely dressed boy, Fred Stanhope, from whom Ned, as the reader will remember, had received two suits of clothes as a present, came along. His face lighted up as he recognized Ned.

"How are you, Ned?" he exclaimed, his face showing the pleasure he felt.

"I am very well, thank you, Fred," Ned responded, with equal pleasure.

"Why don't you call and see me?"

"I have been intending to, but was not sure whether you would be at leisure."

"Come around next Wednesday evening. It is my birthday, and grandpa gives me a party. Delmonico furnishes the supper. That may be an inducement, even if you have no other."

"Thank you, Fred. I will do so with pleasure."

"Mind and come early. Then you can see more of me."

Fred bowed and passed on.

Leon Granville was impressed in spite of himself. It was clear that Ned had at least one fashionable acquaintance, a father friend.

"Who was that?" he inquired, abruptly.

"Fred Stanhope."

"Where does he live?"

"At No. —— Madison Avenue."

"Is he the son of Richard Stanhope, the millionaire?"

"Not son, but grandson."

"Where did you first meet him?"

"At his own house."

"You seem to be intimate?"

"Yes; I think a great deal of Fred. He is one of my best friends."

"Have they got a fine house?"

"Very fine."

Leon Granville eyed Ned with a puzzled expression. He had formed an idea that Ned was a person of low position, yet here he was on evidently intimate terms with the grandson of a millionaire.

"I wish you had introduced me to young Stanhope," he said.

"I may have an opportunity hereafter."

Ned said this, but did not promise to make use of the opportunity. He felt that he would rather not intrude Leon upon his friend, but it was not necessary to say so.

"Well, good-evening," said Leon; "we'll meet to-morrow."

"Were you really invited by the Astors, Mr. Newton?" asked St. Clair.

"No," answered Ned, laughing; "but it is quite as true as Leon's representations. I don't believe in his intimacy with so many fashionable families."

CHAPTER XII.

A PLOT AGAINST NED.

Leon Granville was taking his lunch at a small, cheap restaurant on Nassau Street. Opposite him sat a boy employed in another store on Fulton Street.

"Say, Leon," inquired this boy, "who's that new chap you've got in your store?"

"His name is Ned Newton. I never heard of him before he came to us."

"I wonder Mr. Simmons should employ such a boy."

"Why?" asked Leon, eagerly. "Do you know anything against him?"

"Well, not exactly against him, but I am surprised such a boy should have got into your store."

"What do you mean? Why shouldn't he?"

"It isn't customary for merchants to employ bootblacks."

"You don't mean to say Ned Newton was ever a bootblack!" exclaimed Leon, his eyes almost bulging out in his surprise.

"Yes, I do. There's no doubt about it. How long has he been in the store?"

"A little over a week."

"Two weeks ago he was blacking boots in front of the Astor House. I missed him lately, for I have to go by the hotel every day. I was wondering what had become of him when, day before yesterday, I saw him at work in your store."

"He is not only employed there, but he is paid, though a green hand, the same wages as myself, who have been there two years and am two years older. It's an outrage, I say."

"Do you think Mr. Simmons knows that he was once a bootblack?"

"I don't believe he does. I've a great mind to tell my uncle—the head salesman, you know—and get him to tell the boss."

"I would if I were you. It's a regular insult to you to put you on a par with a bootblack."

Leon was delighted to receive this information about the boy he disliked. He had no intention of keeping it to himself. He had strong hopes that, when communicated to Mr. Simmons, it would insure the dismissal of Ned. It certainly did not show a very amiable spirit in Leon to desire the downfall of his fellow-clerk, but Leon was not an amiable boy.

It was not till they were on their way home after the

closing of the store that Leon had an opportunity of communicating his news to Mr. Kimball.

The head clerk would not at first believe it.

"Somebody must have been deceiving you," he said, sharply.

"I think not. Sam Trent says he has been in the habit of seeing the boy with his blacking-box at work in front of the Astor House for a year at least."

"It is a very strange story," said his uncle.

"Don't you think Mr. Simmons ought to be told?"

"Yes, I don't think he can be aware of the former occupation of his favorite."

If Mr. Kimball had only understood the matter he would have seen that Ned was far from being a favorite with Mr. Simmons, and that his being received into the store was only the first step in a scheme to injure him. But of course this was entirely unknown to him.

"I don't like to have to associate with a bootblack," went on Leon, plaintively. "It beats me how such a boy could have got in with Fred Stanhope, and received an invitation to his birthday party."

"Probably young Stanhope doesn't know anything of the boy's past history."

"I did not think of that. I've a great mind to write him a note, and give him the information. Then when Master Ned makes his appearance in the millionaire's parlors he may get a different reception from the one he anticipates."

"A good thought. You'd better write to him. When is the party?"

"To-morrow evening."

"Then you had better lose no time in writing the letter."

That evening in his uncle's room—Mr. Kimball occupied a large apartment, and Leon a hall bedroom in the same house—Leon wrote the following letter, which was a very cowardly and mean one:

"MASTER FRED STANHOPE: I understand that you have invited to your party a boy named Ned Newton. I am sure you are not aware of his real character and position. Until a fortnight since he used to black boots in front of the Astor House. I can prove this to you by a boy that has known him for a good while. It is Sam Trent, who is employed at Thorpe & Co.'s jewelry store on Fulton Street. I have a great respect for you and your family, though I have not the pleasure of knowing you, and I don't like to see you taken in by a boy who is unworthy of your esteem. I may tell you in confidence that you are not the only one he has deceived. He has obtained a place in a nice store on Fulton Street by misrepresenting his position. I haven't anything against the boy, but I think it is only right to tell you this."

"FROM A FRIEND."

Leon showed this letter to his uncle.

"How will it do?" he asked.

"It is very well expressed," replied Mr. Kimball.

"Have you any changes to suggest, uncle?"

"No. Send it as it is."

Leon copied the letter, inclosed it in an envelope, and addressed it in his best hand to

"MASTER FREDERICK STANHOPE,

"No. —— MADISON AVENUE,

"NEW YORK CITY."

"I think, Mr. Newton, this will settle your hash," he muttered, triumphantly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PLOT FAILS.

When Ned was dressed for the party he appeared to very good advantage. He was a fresh, healthy-looking boy, with attractive features, and in his best suit he looked uncommonly well. Mrs. Newton regarded him with pardonable pride, and expressed the wish that he might have a pleasant time.

It cannot be said that Ned was altogether at his ease when he ascended the steps of Mr. Stanhope's residence. He was about to make his *début* in fashionable society—and of all those he was to meet, he only knew the Stanhope family.

He was received in the hall by Fred, who welcomed him warmly, and introduced him to several of his friends.

Later in the evening Fred came to Ned's side.

"I have five minutes to spare," he said, "and I want to show you a letter."

Fred turned into a little room adjoining, and was followed by Ned.

"Have you an enemy?" he asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"Have you any idea who wrote me this letter?" asked Fred, producing the anonymous document sent by Leon Granville.

As Ned read the letter his face flushed, and he looked serious.

"It is true," he said, slowly, "about my former business. I am afraid I ought not to have accepted your invitation."

"Don't be foolish, Ned!" said his friend. "Do you think I value you any the less for what you couldn't help? It wasn't for that I showed you the letter. I wanted you to tell me, if you can, who wrote it?"

"Do you remember the boy who was with me when we met on Broadway, and you gave me the invitation?"

"Yes; a boy rather taller than you."

"He is a boy employed in the same store with me, and I have reason to think, dislikes me."

"What's his name?"

"Leon Granville."

"Have you ever seen any of his handwriting?"

"No."

"Then you can't identify this as his?"

"No; but I cannot think of any one else likely to write it. I don't know how he found out that I used to black boots in front of the Astor House."

"He refers to a boy named Sam Trent, working at Thorpe & Co.'s."

"I know the boy. I have seen him with Leon Granville. That satisfies me that it was Leon who wrote the letter."

"You would better look out for this Leon. It was my duty to tell you about it, but, of course, I shall take no notice of it. By the way, the writer says you obtained your place by misrepresenting your position."

"He may think so, but Mr. Simmons knew very well what my business had been. He has seen me in front of the Astor House himself."

"No doubt this Leon will tell him, and find that he has wasted his time."

"I hope he will. I have nothing to fear on that score."

The next day the disclosure referred to took place. Mr. Kimball went into the main office where Mr. Simmons was seated, and called his attention by a preliminary cough.

"Have you anything to say to me, Mr. Kimball?" asked the merchant.

"I wished to say a word in reference to the new boy, Ned Newton."

"Very well."

"I presume you are not fully acquainted with his history."

"Perhaps not; what do you know about him? If it is anything likely to affect his usefulness, or anything against his character, I shall be glad to hear you communicate it."

"It is not exactly against his character; but still, considering that ours is a high-toned shop, I think it worthy of attention."

"Proceed!"

"Do you know that this boy formerly, indeed recently, as I learn, was employed as a bootblack in front of the Astor House?"

Kimball expected to see his employer show signs of astonishment, but in this he was disappointed.

"Yes, I am quite aware of it," answered Mr. Simmons. "I have seen him there myself."

Kimball's countenance fell. His terrible disclosure had fallen flat.

"Oh, if you know it already, that is sufficient," he stammered. "I didn't know as you would like to employ

a boy likely to be recognized by some of our customers as a bootblack."

"That is not likely to affect his usefulness as a clerk."

"If he were dishonest, now, or were caught stealing from the store, that would be a different thing."

He fixed his eyes upon Kimball, in a manner which the latter did not understand. He could not, of course, comprehend that Mr. Simmons was desirous that a charge of dishonesty should be brought against Ned. The merchant was too subtle for him.

"I don't suppose it is any of my business," said Kimball, hesitating, "but I wonder that you should pay him so high a salary. It is as much as my nephew, Leon, receives."

"I am quite aware that it is more than the boy earns, but I have my own reasons for giving him as much."

Kimball was not satisfied, but did not venture to make any further objection.

He reported to Leon as they were returning home that evening.

"Simmons knows all about the boy having been a bootblack," he said. "He told me that he had himself seen him at work in front of the Astor House."

"And yet he engaged him to come into the store! I don't understand it."

"Nor I," said Kimball, shaking his head.

"The boy must be a favorite with him."

"He didn't speak as if he were. He said if the boy were guilty of dishonesty he would discharge him."

"Perhaps he will prove so," said Leon, significantly.

"I shouldn't be surprised. A boy in his former business is very likely to steal."

This remark of Leon's, however, casts undeserved censure upon a class of boys, many of whom are exposed to strong temptations without yielding to them.

During the morning Leon had watched Ned curiously. He was anxious to find whether his letter had produced the effect he anticipated. He hoped that the revelation of Ned's humble antecedents would chill the friendship of his fashionable friends.

"How did you enjoy yourself?" he asked, as soon as he had an opportunity. "Was the party a pleasant one?"

"Very much so. I had a splendid time."

Leon arched his brows in surprise.

"I thought you would feel like a cat in a strange garret," he remarked.

"So I should, if it had not been for the kindness of Fred Stanhope," Ned replied.

"He can't have received my letter," thought Leon, annoyed.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEON'S TRICK.

Leon Granville was extremely incensed against Ned when he found that his anonymous letter had had no effect.

"If I can only see that young bootblack kicked out of the store I shall be happy," he said, to himself. He had already formed a plan to get Ned into trouble, and resolved to carry it out without delay.

As the youngest clerk, it was the duty of Ned to arrive first and open the store. It was a chily day in September, and our hero wore a fall overcoat which had been given him by his friend, Fred Stanhope. This he hung up in a closet in the back part of the store, which was specially designed for the hats and coats of the employees.

Later it happened that only Leon and Roscoe St. Clair, the young salesman, were left in the store. The rest had gone out to dinner.

"Are you not going to dinner, Mr. St. Clair?" asked Leon.

"No; I don't care for any lunch to-day."

The fact was, Mr. St. Clair had been a little extravagant, having been tempted by a handsome silk scarf, and had resolved to make up for his unusual outlay by abstaining from lunch for a few days.

"Confound him!" thought Leon. "Why won't he go?"

"You'd better go out for a walk, then," he said.

Roscoe St. Clair was not given to suspicions, but it did dawn upon him that Leon seemed unusually anxious to get rid of him. His curiosity was excited, and he answered, "Perhaps you are right, Leon. I will just take the air a few minutes. But it will leave you alone."

"Never mind!" said Leon. "One of the other clerks will be in directly, and we don't have many customers at this hour, you know."

"That is true," answered St. Clair, as he took his hat and left the store.

"Thank Heaven! I've got rid of him. Now I'll do the business for the young bootblack," said Leon.

But Roscoe St. Clair, instead of taking a walk away from the store, stepped into an alleyway at one side, on which there was a window allowing an outsider to look into the shop.

He quickly reached the window, and looking in, himself unobserved, watched to see what Leon was about.

He saw his young fellow-clerk go to a box containing a dozen new and rich French silk ties, and draw therefrom three or four. St. Clair supposed he was going to appropriate them to his own use, but continued to watch.

Leon, with the ties in his hand, swiftly went to the closet, and slipped them into the pocket of Ned's overcoat. It must be explained that Ned had gone out to

lunch without it, the weather having moderated perceptibly since morning. Luckily, from his place at the window St. Clair saw the whole. It is needless to say that the little man, who was himself the soul of integrity, was horror-struck by this evidence of malice.

"He is doing that to get Ned into trouble," he said. "It is lucky I saw it. I won't let on till it is necessary."

In order that Leon might not suspect that he had been seen, St. Clair swiftly withdrew from his post of observation, and took a walk as far as the Astor House. There he loitered five minutes at a paper stand, and then strolled back.

After Leon had accomplished the trick he had in view for a considerable time, a complacent smile sat upon his face.

"There, Master Ned," he reflected, "I rather guess your kettle of fish is cooked at last. I don't think you will much longer be in the employ of Mr. Elias Simmons. You will have to go back to your old business, if you are lucky enough to escape a four-weeks' residence at Blackwell's Island. I wonder what your fashionable friend, Fred Stanhope, will say when he learns what has become of his bootblack friend."

Just then a clerk came in, and soon all were back at their posts.

Roscoe St. Clair looked curiously at Leon as he entered. A new light had been thrown upon his character, and St. Clair was almost surprised to find that he was looking as usual.

"If I had been up to such a piece of rascality," he thought, "I should show it in my face and manner. How can any one be so wicked?"

"Well, Mr. St. Clair, don't you feel better for your walk?" asked Leon, lightly.

"I don't know but I do. Have you been out yourself?"

"No; but I may slip out in half an hour or so."

"I wonder how soon he is going to fire the mine, and try to involve Ned in the explosion?" St. Clair asked himself. "Shall I give Ned a hint of it?"

On this point he was undecided, but concluded on the whole that he would let matters take their course, since he would always be able to clear Ned by giving an account of what he had seen through the window. The suspense, however, made him seem unusually nervous.

Mr. Simmons was out—indeed he had been out for a couple of hours. Leon began to feel anxious for his return. He wanted the grand explosion to come during the presence of the proprietor. The sensation would be greater, and as Mr. Simmons was rather a quick-tempered man, he thought it probable that in his indignation he would either summarily discharge Ned, or perhaps have him arrested. The last would please Leon best, for

his envy and jealousy had become so strong that mere dismissal did not seem to him sufficient.

He went up to his uncle, the head clerk, whose name, as will be remembered, was Kimball.

"Mr. Simmons stays out a long time," said Leon.

"Longer than usual. I think he will be back soon." Then observing a significant look on his nephew's face, he added, "Did you want to see him about anything?"

"Yes; I've made a discovery about his favorite, Ned Newton."

"I see," Kimball responded, with a look of intelligence.

"And I am waiting till he comes back to tell him."

"You won't have to wait long, for here he is."

In fact Mr. Simmons at that moment entered the store.

"Better wait a few minutes!" whispered Kimball. "It will look better."

"Will you mention to Mr. Simmons that I have something to say to him?"

"Presently, Leon. Leave the matter to me."

Twenty minutes later Kimball went up to his employer.

"Mr. Simmons," he said, "Leon has something to communicate to you. I don't know what it is, but he seems to think it important."

"Send him to me," said the merchant.

CHAPTER XV.

A FALSE CHARGE.

Leon entered the presence of Mr. Simmons with a well-assumed air of respectful deference. He was a politic boy, and he understood that the best way to ingratiate one's self with a man is commonly to recognize his superiority.

"Mr. Kimball tells me that you have something to say to me," began Elias Simmons.

"Yes, sir," answered Leon, and then stopped.

"What is it?"

"I don't like to tell you, but I think it my duty to do so."

"Why don't you like to tell me?"

"Because it is likely to prejudice you against a person who is in your employ," answered Leon, casting down his eyes.

"To whom do you refer?" asked the merchant. "Don't beat about the bush, but say what you have to say."

"I refer to Ned Newton."

"Ha!" said Mr. Simmons, with evidently increased interest, and for the first time laying down his pen. "What have you to tell me about that boy?"

"Well, sir, I had occasion to examine a box of French ties—those you received by the last steamer—and I found to my surprise that several were missing. Now I knew that there had not been so many sold, and I feared that they had been taken, possibly by some outsider. But I

happened to look into the clothes closet this morning, and I saw one lying on the floor directly under the overcoat belonging to Ned Newton. I don't know that I did right, but on the impulse of the moment I felt in his pocket, and found three of the ties there. The one I found on the floor I replaced in the box."

"And you infer that young Newton stole the ties from the box."

"It looks like it, sir; doesn't it?"

Elias Simmons paused before answering. He did not believe that Ned was a thief, and he had a shrewd suspicion that the boy before him knew more about the ties than Ned, but it suited him to credit the charge. It might enable him to get Ned and his mother out of the city, and this seemed to him even more necessary than ever, as he had just heard that Aunt Eunice had a severe cold, which in a person of her age might prove serious, possibly fatal.

"Yes," he answered, after a pause; "it does look like it. I thank you for telling me."

Leon's eyes glowed with satisfaction. It was evident that his scheme was working well.

"You can send young Newton to me," said Mr. Simmons, "and you may come with him."

"Very well, sir."

Ned was standing behind the counter, quite unaware of the danger that menaced him, when Leon approached and said, "Newton, Mr. Simmons wishes to speak to you."

"Very well!" said Ned, thinking that it was upon some business matter.

Leon followed him to the merchant's desk.

"I believe you wish to see me," said Ned.

"Yes; I wish to speak to you on a matter of some importance."

There was something in the merchant's tone that struck Ned unpleasantly, and he waited further words, merely bowing.

"Some French ties recently added to my stock have disappeared," continued Elias Simmons.

"I am sorry to hear it, sir."

"Do you know anything about them?"

"Certainly not," answered Ned, indignantly, for now he understood that suspicion was cast upon him. "Does anybody charge me with it?"

"Yes," said the merchant, curtly.

"Who is it, sir?"

"That young man," and the merchant pointed at Leon, who was just behind Ned.

Ned flushed an indignant glance at him.

"Then, sir," he retorted, firmly, "I have only to say that he lies—basely and meanly."

"Of course you'd say so!" sneered Leon, angrily.

"Let him prove what he charges!"

"Leon, lead the way to the clothes closet!"

"You shall be accommodated," said the merchant.

Nothing loath, Leon started off, Elias Simmons and Ned Newton following close behind him.

Leon pointed to Ned's overcoat which was hanging from a nail.

Then he plunged his hand into the right-hand pocket, and drew therefrom three fine French ties.

"You see I told the truth, Mr. Simmons," said Leon, looking maliciously at Ned.

"What have you to say to this?" demanded Mr. Simmons, sternly.

Ned flushed and then paled. He was almost speechless with indignation. But at last he found words.

"All I say, sir, is that I know nothing whatever of the ties, or how they got into my pocket."

"That is a weak defense."

"It may be weak, but I think I can explain it."

"Do so."

"They were put there by Leon Granville, a boy who dislikes me, with the intention of getting me into trouble."

Leon was prepared for this accusation, and he took it coolly.

"Mr. Simmons," he said, "I have been in your employ nearly two years, and no such charge has ever before been made against me."

"That is true."

"This boy, Ned Newton, has been in the store only a few weeks. I admit that I don't like him, but I don't think that proves anything."

"Certainly not," said the merchant, who had his reasons, as we know, for countenancing Leon, and backing up his charge against Ned.

"Have you anything more to say, Newton?" asked Mr. Simmons.

"Yes, sir; I wish to ask Leon how he found out that the ties were in the pocket of my overcoat."

"I can answer that readily. I had occasion to come to the closet, and saw a tie on the floor just under your coat. It occurred to me that there might be some others in your pocket, and I accordingly put in my hand, and found these three."

"You didn't take them out?"

"No; I put them back, not feeling at liberty to meddle with what did not belong to me. I can only say that I was very sorry to find out that you were dishonest, and didn't like to expose you, but thought it my duty to Mr. Simmons, my kind and liberal employer."

Ned regarded him with undisguised scorn.

"You seem to be a hypocrite as well as a sneak," he said.

"I don't care for your abuse," said Leon, meekly. "Mr. Simmons will understand what it means."

"I wish to ask you one question—did you not send an

anonymous letter to Fred Stanhope, hoping to prejudice him against me?"

Leon colored, and looked embarrassed. He took refuge in evasion.

"I don't see what that has to do with the matter," he said.

"It has nothing to do with the matter," said Elias Simmons, decidedly. "I have no concern with the relations of friendship or enmity that subsist between you two boys. It is my business, however, to keep thieves out of my employment. It seems clear to me that you, Edward Newton, have repaid my kindness and liberality in the basest manner. Perhaps I ought not to feel surprised, considering your past history and associations. I might order your arrest, and proceed against you criminally, but I will forbear, on condition that you will leave the city within a week, and go to some new place where you can lead a more creditable life."

"Mr. Simmons, you are very unjust!" exclaimed Ned. "I am as innocent of theft as you are!"

"What proof can you bring of your innocence? To what witness can you appeal?"

Ned was silent, but he was not called upon to answer. Roscoe St. Clair, who guessed what was going on, and had listened to the last part of the conversation, presented himself boldly, and said, "I am the witness you are looking for, Ned. You didn't take those ties. I know the one who did!"

Elias Simmons looked at St. Clair in ~~an~~ ~~surprise~~ surprise, and Leon was the picture of consternation.

CHAPTER XVI.

NED'S VINDICATION.

"Do you know anything about this affair, Mr. St. Clair?" asked the merchant, after a pause.

"Yes, sir," answered the little clerk, with unusual firmness.

"Did you see young Newton take the ties?"

"No, sir; nor did any one else see him do it."

"Probably not," said Leon, significantly.

"He wasn't likely to do it when any one was looking on."

"I saw the ties taken, however," went on Roscoe St. Clair, in a tone quite as significant as Leon's.

Leon showed unmistakable signs of nervousness, and fixed his eyes on St. Clair, with an expression of evident alarm.

"Explain yourself," said the merchant, coldly.

St. Clair told his story. He dwelt upon the evident desire of Leon to get him out of the way. This he said, excited his curiosity, and he slipped into the alleyway to watch the interior of the store. Leon became more and more nervous.

"Spy!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I became a spy, and events showed that I was justified in doing so," said St. Clair. "I saw you, Leon Granville, go to the box of ties, take out several, and going to the closet, slip them into the pocket of Ned Newton's overcoat."

"That's a lie!" ejaculated Leon, but his voice trembled. "You couldn't see into the closet from the window."

"If you doubt it you can go out and try it for yourself. I am ready to swear that you put the ties into Ned's overcoat. I suspected your object, for I knew you disliked him, and was resolved to speak in his favor."

Ned grasped St. Clair's hand, and said gratefully, "I thank you, Mr. St. Clair. You have done me a great service. I didn't suppose any one would be mean enough to get up such a plot against me."

"How much do you expect to be paid for this convenient testimony, Mr. St. Clair?" asked Leon, in a tone meant to be scornful.

"That question does not deserve an answer," said St. Clair, with unwonted spirit.

"I think, Mr. Simmons, that I don't need to defend myself after this testimony," said Ned. "As for you, Leon, the time may come when you will be ashamed of your meanness."

"Do you believe them, Mr. Simmons?" asked Leon, with bold assurance. "They are evidently in league together."

"Do you deny what I have charged you with?" asked St. Clair.

"Yes, I do; and I wait for Mr. Simmons' decision."

Elias Simmons paused a moment in indecision. He fully believed St. Clair's testimony, but he did so against his will. It interferred with his plans.

"I will take the matter into consideration," he said. "The testimony is contradictory, and requires reflection. You can all go back to your work, and when I have made up my mind I will let you know."

The three clerks returned to their duties. Leon, with the consciousness of guilt, felt most uncomfortable. He went to his uncle, and in a low voice acquainted him with the unlucky issue of the conspiracy.

"You were a fool not to make sure that there was no spy watching you," said Kimball, bluntly.

"I certainly didn't expect St. Clair, who is half an idiot, would be watching me."

"He is in with young Newton, and no one is too much of a fool to use his eyes."

"What shall I do? Do you think Mr. Simmons will discharge me?"

"Not if I can help it. I will do what I can to prejudice him against Ned and that dude St. Clair. Just go about

your business, and I will try to manage for you. Only don't put your oar in, for you won't help matters."

The fact was, Mr. Simmons was in a quandary. He wanted to discharge Ned and get him out of the city, and hoped to do so by this charge of dishonesty; but the tables were turned, and there seemed no good pretext for taking this course.

About three o'clock his son Eustace came into the store.

Eustace had not been in his father's store since Ned was employed there, being in daily attendance at school.

He caught sight of our hero, and said, in a patronizing manner: "Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes," answered Ned.

"Quite a raise for you to get into such a store as this." Ned nodded.

"My father was very kind. There are not many who would take a bootblack into their business."

Ned did not feel called upon to reply.

"How do you do, Mr. Simmons?" said Leon, effusively.

"Very well, Leon," responded Eustace, graciously, for he liked to be flattered.

"I see you know the new boy."

"Newton? Yes; I know him slightly. How do you like him?"

"I would rather not say."

"Why would you rather not say?"

"Because he may be a favorite of yours."

"You needn't be troubled about that. He is no favorite of mine," said Eustace, with emphasis.

"Then I don't mind saying that I don't fancy him."

"I am not surprised. Father engaged him out of pity. He is very poor, and has some relation to support."

"And very kind it is in your father, too! He is a very generous-hearted man."

"That's a nice fellow," thought Eustace. "He is always polite, and treats me with proper respect."

Eustace made his way up to where his father was sitting.

"What, Eustace? I didn't know you meant to come over to-day," said the merchant.

"It is a holiday—the head teacher is sick, and I thought I would take a run over and look at you. Besides I've got something to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Aunt Eunice is coming to the city to-morrow, and may make you a call."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Simmons, in alarm. "Who told you?"

"That old woman that lives with her—Jane Barclay—called at the house to-day, and said that Aunt Eunice was coming to New York to-morrow on some matter of busi-

ness. She said also that she would probably call at the store."

"Good Heavens! what if she should see that boy, Ned?"

"Just what I say. I always thought you were imprudent to take him into the store."

"I had a reason for it, but it looks now as if my plan had miscarried."

"Can't you send him away to-morrow? If she suspected who he was it would make a pretty kettle of fish."

"I think I shall discharge him altogether. Something has happened this morning which will give me a convenient pretext. It's a terrible thing to have such a cloud hanging over my head. Aunt Eunice doesn't like me very much, and if she should come across this boy and his mother she might take it into her head to leave them all her property."

"I am very glad you told me of Aunt Eunice's visit," continued Elias Simmons. "She hasn't been here for two years, and I should not have dreamed of danger from such a source."

"Isn't the news worth two dollars, father?" asked Eustace.

His father's answer was to draw a two-dollar bill from his pocket, and put it into his son's hand.

Eustace left the store well pleased, and sought the Bowery, where he visited a dime museum.

CHAPTER XVII.

DISMISSED WITHOUT A RECOMMENDATION.

Ned supposed that he had been vindicated, and that his troubles were at an end. But in this he reckoned without his host, or rather, without a knowledge of his uncle's secret dislike and fear of him.

About an hour before the store usually closed he was summoned to the presence of Mr. Simmons. The latter seemed embarrassed.

"I have sent for you to say that I cannot retain you in my service," he commenced.

"Why not, sir?" asked Ned. "Have I not performed my duties properly?"

"Well, ahem! you are inexperienced."

"You knew that, sir, when you engaged me. I have done my best to learn what is required of me."

"Then, again, the trouble of this afternoon," proceeded Mr. Simmons, lamely.

"But I am not responsible if a false charge is brought against me," returned Ned, indignantly.

"Well, it doesn't seem quite clear how the matter stands."

"Didn't Mr. St. Clair clear me? If I had brought a false accusation against one of my fellow-clerks I should expect to be discharged."

"I won't pretend to judge between you. I am intending to discharge Leon, too."

"Then, sir, I have nothing to say."

"I shall pay you to the end of the week, but I wish you to consider this your last day of service."

"Very well, sir!"

"You may send Leon Granville to me."

Ned bowed acquiescence.

Leon sought his employer's desk, feeling rather nervous.

"I have just discharged young Newton," began Mr. Simmons.

Leon's eyes expressed delighted surprise.

"I thought you would attach no credit to St. Clair's story," he said.

"But I do, or, rather, I consider it an open question."

Leon's countenance fell.

"Under the circumstances I have decided to discharge you both."

Consternation was clearly depicted on Leon's face.

"I didn't expect this," he said.

"It is the shortest way out of the difficulty."

"But, sir, how shall I get along? I need the salary I get."

"So does Ned Newton. However, you will be paid to the end of the week, and if you will come around on Monday morning I may decide to take you back. Not a word of this, however, to young Newton, who has been told that you, as well as he, are to go."

Leon looked much relieved. After all his pay was not to be stopped, and all it amounted to was that he would have three days' vacation—something to which he had no possible objection.

"I understand, sir. I won't breathe a word to Ned Newton."

"You and he can both go to the bookkeeper and receive your week's wages. I would rather you would keep away from the store for the balance of the week."

"It shall be as you say, sir. I try in every way to carry out your wishes."

Leon pulled on a long face, and made it in his way to speak to Ned.

"Well," he said, "I've had my walking papers. Are you to go, too?"

"Yes," answered Ned, coldly.

"Then we're both in the same boat."

"In one way, but not in another. I have done nothing to justify a discharge."

"We won't dispute about that now, as we are both turned adrift. I only want to say that I have no malice against you, in spite of all that has happened."

"Why should you? It is you who have injured me."

If Ned had had more knowledge of the world, he would

have known that it is those who injure, rather than those who are injured, who feel the greatest animosity.

"I will go farther," continued Leon, in a conciliatory tone, "and say that if I get a place first, and have a chance to get you in, too, I will cheerfully do so."

"Thank you," said Ned, stiffly, for he put not the slightest confidence in Leon's statement, "but I think it will be better that we should not be in the same store hereafter."

"Just as you say," returned Leon, indifferently.

He went up to his uncle, who had felt somewhat anxious about his nephew's summons from his employer.

"Uncle," he said, in a low voice, "Newton and I are both discharged."

"What!" exclaimed his uncle, in dismay, for this would entail upon him the support of his nephew, while he was waiting to obtain a new position. "I'll go to Mr. Simmons, and see if I can't induce him to take you back. I can't afford to have you idle."

"Don't feel troubled, uncle! It'll all come right. I will tell you all about it after we leave the store."

"I hope it will, for it isn't so easy to find a new place."

"I sha'n't have to find a new place. It will all come out right."

The head salesman was somewhat reassured by Leon's confident tone, but he could not see what grounds he had for assuming it.

While Leon was holding this conference with his uncle, Ned managed to speak to Roscoe St. Clair.

"I've got my walking ticket," he said.

"What is that for?" asked St. Clair, surprised.

"Mr. Simmons seems to want to get rid of me, that's all I can say."

"He doesn't believe you guilty after what I said?"

"I don't know. At any rate, I am to go. Leon is to go, too."

"That's one comfort. Don't forget to ask for a letter of recommendation. You will need it to secure another place."

"I am glad you mentioned it."

Ned took an opportunity to speak to Mr. Simmons before the close of business.

"Will you allow me to refer to you, sir," he asked, "or give me a letter of recommendation?"

Mr. Simmons looked annoyed. He wanted Ned to leave the city, and he did not feel disposed to make it easy for him to remain so dangerously near. He hesitated a moment, and then made answer. "I will allow you to refer to me on one condition."

"What is that, sir?"

"That you find a place in some other city."

"I might find a place in Brooklyn, Mr. Simmons, but I don't see why you object to my remaining in New York."

"I cannot give you a reference for either Brooklyn or New York," said Simmons, hastily.

"Why not, sir?"

"Your new employer might hear that a charge of dishonesty was brought against you here, and blame me for recommending you."

This sounded plausible, but in view of his entire innocence Ned felt that he was unjustly treated.

"As a friend, I advise you to go to Philadelphia, or better still, to Chicago," continued the merchant, eying Ned, anxiously, to see how the suggestion seemed to strike him.

"I prefer to remain in New York, sir," answered Ned. "Here I have friends. I don't care to go among strangers."

"Then I must decline to recommend you."

When business closed Ned received his money and went home.

His mother noticed his grave and serious look when he entered the house.

"Has anything happened?" she asked.

"Yes, mother, I bring you bad news. I am discharged."

"But on what grounds? I am sure you have done nothing wrong."

Ned told the story. His mother and Madge listened with indignation.

"What a bad boy that Leon is," cried Madge. "I'd like to pull his hair."

"Or apprentice him to Mrs. McCurdy," suggested Ned. "Well, it can't be helped. I shall try to find another place. But this will be a difficulty. Mr. Simmons won't allow me to refer to him—that is, unless I consent to leave the city."

"But why should he want you to leave the city?"

"I don't know. I will give you the reason he assigned." Mrs. Newton listened attentively.

"I don't think that is the true reason," she said, in conclusion. "I think there is something behind."

"There may be, but I can't imagine what it can be. Well, mother, I won't be discouraged. I think I can make a living without Mr. Simmons. If the worst comes I can go back to my old business, though I should hate to."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS SIMMONS CALLS AT THE STORE.

About eleven o'clock the next morning a small, old lady, somewhat bent, and apparently feeble, walked slowly up Fulton Street, supported on the arm of a woman of middle age.

It was Miss Eunice Simmons, and her companion was Jane Barclay.

The two women reached the store, and entered it.

Elias Simmons had been on the watch for the visitors, and he hastened to the door to receive them.

"How glad I am to see you, Aunt Eunice," he said. "I consider it a great compliment that you should come so far to see me."

"But I didn't," said the old lady, bluntly. "I came to the city to see my lawyer."

"Indeed, aunt!" said Elias, his tone showing some anxiety. "Was the business very important?"

"All business is important, Nephew Elias."

"Of course; but would he not have gone to Brooklyn to your house?"

"And charged me roundly for his trouble? I have no doubt he would. But I am not bedridden, Nephew Elias, and I am strong enough to come to New York."

"Of course; I was only considering your comfort."

By this time the ladies were seated, one of the clerks having been directed to bring chairs for their use.

Miss Eunice began to cast her eyes about the store—sharp eyes they were, too, in spite of her age.

"You've got a showy store here, Elias," she said.

"Yes, I think it looks pretty passable."

"And no doubt you are doing a fine business?"

"Yes," answered Elias Simmons, hesitatingly, "my business is very satisfactory, but if I had a little extra capital I could do considerably more."

"I have heard you say that before," said the old lady, dryly. "Let well enough alone! That is my advice. You surely must make enough to support yourself handsomely."

"Certainly, certainly! But, Aunt Eunice, I am ambitious. It is tantalizing to think how much more I might do, and you know I have my son to provide for."

"If you leave him this business it ought to be enough."

"Eustace doesn't seem to have a fancy for business. I think of sending him to college, and educating him to a profession."

"Then he's a great scholar, is he?"

"Well, I don't know that I can say that, but he can hold his own."

"Like his father before him," suggested the old lady, with a laugh, which did not strike pleasantly on the ears of her nephew.

"If I had even three thousand dollars more," said Elias, trying to bring back the conversation to the point that interested him, "I would take the adjoining store, and extend my operations."

"No doubt it would prove a very unwise step. You've got a large enough business to care for now. As to that boy of yours, I advise you to take him into the store, and teach him business. I don't believe he'll benefit the world much in a profession."

"I will speak of it to him and his mother," said Elias, biting his lips with vexation at the persistent way in which his aunt evaded his hints about a loan.

"Do so. The chances are that if you make a lawyer of him he won't earn his salt. By the way, Elias, have you heard anything about Hester or her boy?"

"Not a word, aunt."

"What steps have you taken to find out if either is now living?"

"I have employed an agent to look up the matter, and see if he can find a clew. As yet he can learn nothing of

their fate, but is disposed to agree with me that both are dead."

Of course this statement was wholly false, as Elias, for reasons easily guessed, had not taken the first step toward the discovery of Ned or his mother. Indeed, he did not need to do so, for he very well knew that they were living in the city.

"Whatever you have occasion to expend I will make up to you, remember that, Elias."

"My dear aunt, it is unnecessary. I am willing to incur the expense myself."

"How much have you already expended?"

"Oh, a mere trifle, about fifty dollars!"

"I don't call it a trifle. I will send you a check for the amount."

"Pray don't, Aunt Eunice."

"I insist upon it. And keep up the investigation. I want to tell you one thing, Elias, I am thoroughly convinced that Hester and her son are alive—at any rate, the son."

"But what reason have you for thinking so, Aunt Eunice?" said Elias Simmons, in alarm.

"None that you would consider of any account. But I have twice dreamed that I saw them both alive."

"But surely, Aunt Eunice, you don't attach any importance to a dream!"

"It may be foolish, Elias, but I do. More than that, though I am an old woman, I feel that I shall live long enough to see them both. I treated poor Hester badly, but I have made up my mind to make it up to her."

"Confound the credulous old woman!" thought Elias. "It will never do to have her investigating on her own account! Why, an advertisement in any of the New York dailies might be seen by Ned or his mother, and then my goose would be cooked. I must prevent that, at any rate."

"Very well, aunt," he said, "I won't gainsay you. I will do all I can to assist you in your quest. As to the fifty dollars I have expended, you may send it to me if you like, though I don't care to have it repaid."

"Keep careful account of what you spend, Elias, and I will make it all up to you."

"You can rely upon me, my dear aunt. Since it is your wish, that is enough for me. I am afraid we won't accomplish anything, but if we do, I shall have the pleasure of knowing that I have served you."

"You won't lose anything by doing it, Elias."

It did for a moment occur to Elias Simmons that it might be worth his while to reveal the whereabouts of Ned and his mother, but only for a moment. It could not help coming out that he had kept the knowledge secret for a considerable time, and this would be fatal to his hopes of a large legacy. Besides, he had just treated Ned badly.

"Jane," said the old lady, "it is time to go on to the lawyer's office."

"Are you quite rested, Aunt Eunice?"

"Yes, thank you, nephew. Come, Jane!"

"Of all the obstinate, wrong-headed old women in existence, Aunt Eunice will take the palm. If she should meet with that young bootblack, what is to become of my chances? It is enough to drive a man crazy."

The old lady and her companion went on their way to Nassau Street, the lawyer's office being situated in that street.

CHAPTER XIX.

NED FEELS BLUE.

Though Ned was usually cheerful and hopeful, he was considerably depressed by his summary dismissal from the service of Mr. Simmons. He soon found that it would be difficult to obtain another place under the circumstances.

Ned began to find that his brief tenure of office with Mr. Simmons had been very unfortunate for him, and he felt bitterly indignant at that gentleman's refusal to give him such a letter as would help him to secure a position elsewhere.

A day or two afterward he learned something that made him still more indignant. Passing through Fulton Street about noon, he looked through the open door into the store where he had so recently been employed, and to his amazement saw Leon behind the counter.

"So it was only a blind telling me that Leon was discharged!" he said, to himself.

The injustice rankled in his breast, and he involuntarily clinched his fist. It was certainly aggravating to think that this boy, who had plotted against him so basely and treacherously, suffered no harm, while he, an innocent victim of falsehood, whose innocence, moreover, had been amply proved, was left out in the cold.

"I wish I could find out how matters stand," he said, to himself; and was considering whether he had better go inside and ask an explanation when, to his joy, he saw Roscoe St. Clair, his only friend in the store, come out, no doubt on his way to lunch.

Ned quickly joined him.

St. Clair started when Ned put his hand on his shoulder, for he was naturally timid and nervous.

"You gave me quite a start, Mr. Newton," he said.

"Ned!" greeted our hero.

"Ned, I mean. I am glad to see you. Have you got another place?"

"Not yet; but I have something to ask you. Didn't I see Leon behind the counter?"

"Yes; he has never been away."

"Mr. Simmons discharged him at the same time with me."

"It was only make believe. He was back again the next day."

"This is mean and unjust!" exclaimed Ned, flushing.

"Of course it is. But, Ned, there has been another discharge."

"Who is it?"

St. Clair smiled gravely. "I am the one," he said. "Mr. Simmons called me up this morning, and requested me to find another place."

"Did you ask him why you were discharged?" asked Ned, with fresh indignation.

"I did; but he only answered that he thought he could get a more satisfactory clerk for the same money."

"Leon and his uncle are at the bottom of this, Mr. St. Clair."

"I am sure of it, for Leon took the opportunity just afterward to say to me: 'Perhaps, Mr. St. Clair, you will learn to mind your own business in future, and not interfere with me,'"

"I should like to whip that fellow!" said Ned, bitterly. "Why is it that such miserable cravens can triumph over those who try to do their duty?"

"I try to hope that it will all come out right," said St. Clair, sadly; "but, Ned, it is hard on me. I don't know when I shall find another place, and I haven't ten dollars saved up in the world. Perhaps I ought to have been more prudent, but it is very hard to save up anything on nine dollars a week."

"It certainly is," said Ned, sympathetically. "The worst of it is you were discharged on my account."

"Don't think of that, Ned. You are my friend, and I am glad I was able to prove that Leon's charge against you was false."

"Something must be done," said Ned, slowly. "I, too, am in a bad position. I can't get a place because Mr. Simmons won't give me a recommendation. Leon seems to have revenged himself pretty effectually on you and myself."

"So he has. I don't find it easy to hate anybody, and perhaps it is wrong, but I do hate that boy, Leon."

"It would be very strange if you didn't. If Mr. Simmons were a fair and just man, he wouldn't have succeeded in his plot, but he seems to be about as bad as his clerk. This is all the more strange so far as I am concerned, because—I am going to tell you a secret, Mr. St. Clair—because Elias Simmons is my mother's cousin!"

"You don't tell me so!" ejaculated St. Clair, his face showing the intense amazement he felt.

"It is quite true, but I wish you not to speak of it at present, as it will do me no good."

"But he must have some object in treating you thus."

"I think he has, but what it is I don't know. I may learn after a while."

In the afternoon Ned sat down in Madison Square to rest, after fruitless visits to two stores in upper Broadway. He felt decidedly blue, and began to think he might have to return to his old business of blacking boots, though this would be a bitter trial to him. It was about half-past three o'clock when he sat down on one of the park benches. He was aroused from a sad reverie by a familiar voice.

"What are you doing here at this hour?" asked Fred Stanhope, for it was he.

Ned's face lighted up. He was glad to tell his story to so stanch a friend.

"I am doing nothing, and that is all I have to do," he answered.

"I thought you were in a store in Fulton Street?" said Fred, surprised.

"So I was, but I have been discharged."

"Discharged! Why?"

"Because of the enmity of Leon Granville."

"Tell me all about it," said Fred, seating himself on the bench beside his friend.

Fred needed no prompting, but told the entire story in detail.

"It is hard to believe that any man can be so unjust as this Mr. Simmons," said Fred, after a pause.

"I can't understand it myself. It must be owing to the influence of Leon's uncle, who is head salesman."

"Have you tried to get a new place?"

"Yes, but Mr. Simmons will not recommend me, and no one will take me without a recommendation from my last place. The fact that I stayed there so short a time also acts against me. My prospects never were poorer, Fred."

I don't see anything before me but to return to my old business," Ned concluded, with a sigh.

"Don't think of it," said Fred, quickly. "You forget one thing."

"What is that?"

"That my grandfather and I are your friends."

"I value your friendship, Fred, you may be sure, and perhaps, if you were in business I might expect you to give me a place. But as it is I appreciate your sympathy."

"I'll tell you what to do, Ned. Come around and dine at our house, and we'll talk over the affairs with grandpa."

"Thank you, Fred. I won't come to dinner, but I will call this evening, if you are not engaged."

"Come, then. I think we'll find a way out of the difficulty. And now I must be going, for I'm just on my way from school."

Ned was cheered by this conversation and the outspoken sympathy of Fred. Perhaps there might be a chance for him yet.

CHAPTER XX.

NED'S GOOD LUCK,

After the rebuffs he had met with during the day it was very pleasant for Ned to receive the warm welcome he did at Mr. Stanhope's. Fred had told the story to his grandfather, so that Ned was spared the trouble of reciting a disagreeable tale.

"Fred tells me you are out of business, my young friend," said Mr. Stanhope, offering his hand, cordially.

"Yes, sir; and from my experience to-day I am afraid I am likely to remain out of business for some time."

"Things may turn out better than you expect. It appears to me that you have been very unfairly treated."

"I think so. I don't know whether I ever told you that Mr. Simmons is my mother's cousin."

"That makes it still more strange," said Mr. Stanhope, surprised. "Do you think he knew of the relationship?"

"Yes, sir; I think the name would reveal that."

"I begin to feel interested. I suspect that Mr. Simmons has some reason for what he has done."

"It may be so, but I can't think of any. There is one thing that seems odd to me. He won't give me a recommendation unless I leave the city."

"Did he make a point of that?"

"Yes, sir; I proposed to go to Brooklyn, but he said that would not do. I must go to Philadelphia, or Boston, or out West."

Mr. Stanhope looked thoughtful.

"He clearly wants you out of the city," he said, at length. "I can't understand why, but I will think over the matter in your interest. So you have found it difficult to secure a new place?"

"Almost impossible, sir. Employers think it strange that I can offer no recommendation, and when they learn how short a time I was with Mr. Simmons, they appear to think there is something against me."

"That is natural. Taken in connection with what you have told me, Mr. Simmons clearly means to throw all impediments possible in the way of your remaining in New York. He knows that your circumstances require you to be earning an income."

"Yes, sir."

"It is a very unfair advantage to take, but perhaps he

won't be able to injure you as much as he desires. Are you a good writer?"

"I am not much of a scholar, sir; but I am a fair writer."

"Are you good at figures?"

"Arithmetic is my favorite study, but I have not been to school since I was twelve years old. I have had to work steadily."

"I will tell you why I asked. I have a young friend in the insurance business in Nassau Street. He is under obligations to me, for I set him up in business. I will give you a letter to him, and I am confident he will give you a place in his office. How much did Mr. Simmons pay you?"

"Six dollars a week."

"You shall be paid as much as that. You may call there on Monday morning, and I will prepare a letter before you go which will introduce you, and spare any explanations on your part."

"Thank you, very much, sir," said Ned, his spirits rising, till he was almost jubilant. "It will be a great favor to me, and I shall be glad to have Mr. Simmons see that he can't keep me out of employment. I wish Mr. St. Clair might be equally fortunate."

"Who is Mr. St. Clair?" asked Fred.

"The only friend I had in the store. He has lost his place on account of taking my part, and clearing me from a false charge."

"Then I should like to shake hands with him," said Fred.

"Nothing would delight him more than to make your acquaintance. I am afraid the poor fellow will suffer hardship, for he is thrown out of a situation, and has been able to save nothing beyond a few dollars."

"What salary did he receive?" asked Mr. Stanhope.

"A very small one. Though twenty-three years old, he was only paid nine dollars."

"No wonder he couldn't save anything," said Fred.

"Is he a good salesman?" asked the old gentleman.

"Excellent. He isn't what you call smart, but he is very polite and attentive, and has wonderful patience."

"I think I can help him to a place, and I will do so gladly as he has been a friend to you."

Ned's eyes sparkled with gratification.

"Thank you ever so much," he cried, delighted. "May I tell him so?"

"Yes; bring him around to-morrow evening, and I will give him a letter to a *protégé* of mine in the same line of business."

Ned afterward learned that Mr. Stanhope, being a man of practical benevolence, had established a large number of young men in business in and around the city, and so, of course, had an opportunity of finding places with them for other *protégés*.

He managed to see Mr. St. Clair the next day, and gave him the message, much to the delight of the mild young man.

"How can I ever thank you, Ned?" he said, fervently. "I can't tell you how blue I have been feeling, for Mr. Simmons—I think I am justified in calling him old Simmons—wouldn't give me a recommendation, and I was afraid of being quite destitute."

"You could have sold papers, Mr. St. Clair, and I would have had a blacking stand close beside you."

"You will have your joke, Ned. I don't think as a newsboy I would be a success."

"Nor I. You wouldn't have voice enough to call the papers. However, I think we can do better."

Without going into details, I will here record the fact that Ned was engaged in an insurance office at eight dollars a week, the hours being from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon. He was surprised at receiving such a liberal salary, but would have been less so if he had known that Mr. Stanhope made himself responsible for all of the salary over five dollars, but cautioned his new employer not to let Ned into the secret. As for St. Clair, he was quite enchanted, when on presenting his letter to a jobbing house on Church Street, he was offered a clerkship at twelve dollars a week. I am inclined to think that Mr. Stanhope, who was a silent partner in this house, fixed the salary.

CHAPTER XXI.

BRIDGET McCURDY REAPPEARS.

On Monday evening Ned and Mr. St. Clair were sauntering along Broadway just above Seventeenth Street when they came face to face with Leon Granville, who was walking with a friend of his own stamp. A supercilious smile lighted up his face, as he stopped to speak with them.

"Good-evening!" he said, pausing.

"Good-evening!" answered Ned, coldly, for he despised the boy whose meanness had lost him his place.

"Are you resting from the labors of the day?" asked Leon, with a mocking smile.

"Yes."

"Have you got a place yet?"

"I went to work this morning."

"You did? At your old business, I suppose?"

"No; I am in an insurance office."

Leon was disappointed and surprised.

"What do they pay you?"

"Eight dollars a week."

"Is this true?" asked Leon, green with envy.

"I generally speak the truth."

"I hope you will be as lucky, St. Clair," said Leon, turning to Ned's companion. "Situations are hard to get just at present, but—"

"Thank you," answered St. Clair, with pardonable pride, "but I am already provided for."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Leon, chopfallen. "Is it a good place?"

"I am to get twelve dollars a week. You are kind to feel so much interest in me."

"What kind of a house is it?"

"Wholesale."

"Would you mind mentioning me if there is a vacancy?" asked Leon, eagerly.

"I wouldn't think of taking you from Mr. Simmons," answered St. Clair, poitely.

Leon's mortification was intense. He had unwillingly done a good turn to the two whom he meant to injure. The next day both Mr. Kimball and Mr. Simmons were informed of the good luck of the two friends. The merchant cared nothing for St. Clair, but he was seriously annoyed and disturbed by Ned's success.

"He is a thorn in my side," he muttered, "a thorn in my side!"

* * * * *

That very Monday Eunice Simmons, going into the kitchen, saw a stout woman, with a red nose and a bloated face standing over the washtub.

"Are you the woman Miss Barclay engaged?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Bridget McCurdy, for it was she.

At the close of her term of imprisonment, Mrs. McCurdy had made her way at once to her former home, but no one there could give her any news of Madge. So she had taken odd jobs to keep her in food and whiskey.

"So you go out washing?" said Miss Simmons.

"Yes, ma'am, but I ought not to. I'm so wake and delicate that I ought to have some lighter work."

"Indeed, you look weak and delicate," said Miss Eunice, with an irony which Bridget did not understand.

"Indade I am, and a most unfortunate woman. I had a gal, Madge, that used to help me, til she was stole away by the Newtons—"

"Who?" demanded Eunice Simmons, in a quick, startled voice.

"Them Newtons! Mrs. Newton and Ned, that used to live in the same house with me. They got Madge away when I was visiting in the country"—this was the way Mrs. McCurdy referred to her sojourn on Blackwell's Island. "When I came back they were gone."

"Tell me about the Newtons," said Miss Simmons, in strong excitement. "I once knew a family of that name."

Mrs. McCurdy answered her questions, and Eunice Simmons became satisfied that her long quest was at length ended.

"Mrs. McCurdy," she said, "if you will find Mrs. Newton and her son for me, I will give you a hundred dollars."

"Howly mother of Moses!" ejaculated Bridget; "I'll do it or perish in the attempt. Shure, you're in luck at last, Bridget McCurdy!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. McCURDY SUCCEEDS IN HER MISSION.

The next day Mrs. McCurdy set out on her pilgrimage. She went directly to Bleeker Street, thinking she might hear tidings of Madge, and through her of Mrs. Newton.

She addressed herself to an old apple woman on a street corner.

"Have you seen aught of a little match girl, ma'am, lately? She's about ten years old, and has a purty face. She looks as I used to when I was a gal."

"You have changed a good deal, then," said the apple woman.

"Shure I have. What wid the hard work that has made me wake and delicate, and the worry of bringin' up a family, I'm not what I was. But about the gal?"

"Is her name Madge?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. McCurdy, eagerly.

"She used to come here to sell matches, but she doesn't now."

"Then you haven't seen her lately?" asked Bridget, disappointed.

"I saw her yesterday."

"Did you spake with her? Did she tell you where she lived?"

"Why do you want to find her?" asked the apple woman, suspiciously. "Are you the woman that carried her off some months ago?"

"Yes, I am; but I mane her no harm."

"Don't you want to take her away again?"

"No, I don't. I've got no home to take her to."

"Then I don't see why you want to see her," said the apple woman, still suspiciously.

"Then I'll tell you, ma'am. I want to find the lady she's stayin' wid. I've got good news for her."

"What sort of news?"

"There's a rich ould leddy in Brooklyn that wants to find her, and lave her a lot of money."

The apple woman eyed Mrs. McCurdy closely, to see whether she seemed to be speaking the truth, but Bridget looked uncommonly honest, and she felt inclined to help her.

"She told me she lived in Fourth Street," she answered. "Thank you, ma'am."

"You are sure you mean the little gal no harm?"

"I'm ready to swear it, ma'am," said Bridget, briskly.

She was soon in Fourth Street, which is not far from Bleecker Street.

"I wish I knew the number," said Mrs. McCurdy, to herself; "I'd be earnin' the money aisy."

She walked up and down Fourth Street for some time in a perplexed state of mind. Which of the houses she was passing contained the family she wanted so much to see? She couldn't well inquire at every door. But fortune at last favored Mrs. McCurdy, perhaps because she was now really engaged in a praiseworthy enterprise. The old woman's heart leaped joyfully when she saw the girl she knew so well emerging from the door of an English basement house.

Madge was quite unconscious of the nearness of one whom she so much dreaded till she felt a hand upon her shoulder, and looking around saw the familiar face of Mrs. McCurdy.

She trembled and seemed ready to drop, so great was the shock.

"So it's you, Madge!" said Bridget, looking much pleasanter than Madge had ever seen her.

"Yes, Aunt Bridget. Please let me go."

"Don't be afraid, Madge," said Bridget, in a reassuring tone. "I don't mane you no harm. Are you stayin' wid them Newtons?"

"Yes. Please don't take me away."

"I won't, if you'll do as I tell you."

"What is that?"

"Take me to Mrs. Newton. I've got some business with her. Does she live here?"

"Yes, Aunt Bridget."

"Then we'll go in together."

This Madge was willing to do, for she felt that once in the house, and in the presence of Mrs. Newton, she would be safe.

Mrs. Newton was sitting in a rocking-chair, when Madge entered, followed by Mrs. McCurdy.

She looked at the old woman in amazement.

"Mrs. McCurdy!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Mrs. Newton. I'd have called before if I'd

known where you lived, but I only just found out from Madge."

Was it to be peace or war? Mrs. Newton did not know what to think.

"I hope you are well, Mrs. McCurdy," she said.

"I'm always wake and delicate, Mrs. Newton, as you well know, but I'm feelin' middlin' well this mornin'!"

"I hope you haven't come to take away Madge?"

"No, ma'am; I see that Madge is well off with you, and it's all I want. No, I come from an old leddy in Brooklyn who's very anxious to see you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AUNT AND NIECE MEET.

"An old lady in Brooklyn!" exclaimed Mrs. Newton, in amazement, as Mrs. McCurdy told her errand. "What is her name?"

"It's an old maid—Miss Eunice Simmons," replied the Irish woman.

"Aunt Eunice living? I heard she was dead! And she wants to see me?"

"She sent me expressly to find you."

"Where does she live?"

"I'll take you there, ma'am, if you'll go. Is she kin to you?"

"She is my aunt—she brought me up. I have not seen her for years."

"I hear she's rich," said Mrs. McCurdy, significantly. "I hope you won't forget your old friend, Biddy, whin you're ridin' in your carriage."

"Take me to Aunt Eunice, and I will reward you well."

"There's nothin' like bein' paid twice for the same worruk," reflected Bridget, complacently.

Leaving Madge in charge of a neighbor, Mrs. Newton prepared hastily for the trip to Brooklyn, and the ill-assorted pair set out at once, attracting some attention from the contrast they exhibited.

Meanwhile Miss Eunice Simmons was feeling very much excited by the chance information she had obtained from Mrs. McCurdy.

She straightway communicated it to her faithful maid, Jane Barclay.

"It may be Hester," said Jane, cautiously, "but don't be too sure of it. Miss Eunice, for you may be mistaken, and then you will suffer from the disappointment."

"I am sure it is Hester," said the old lady, positively. "The description tallies in every respect."

"Then, again, Mrs. McCurdy may not succeed in finding Mrs. Newton."

"Jane, you are a perfect wet blanket," said Miss Simmons, in a tone of vexation. "Let me, at any rate, indulge in the pleasant anticipation."

"And if there is disappointment?"

"I will bear it. I have borne disappointment before. But oh, Jane, how it will change the world for me. It will give me a new lease of life."

"Then I hope, my dear mistress, it will turn out as you wish. I shall be delighted to see Miss Hester again. But don't worry if you have to wait a week or a month."

"I won't. I will be patient."

But Miss Simmons was not compelled to wait so long. The next day, about one o'clock, the doorbell rang.

Jane Barclay answered the summons, not dreaming that the lost niece had been found so soon.

"I've brought her, Miss Barclay," said Bridget, in a jubilant tone. "This is Mrs. Newton."

"Jane," said Mrs. Newton, with emotion. "Is Aunt Eunice well?"

"It is Hester!" exclaimed Jane, joyfully, and she threw her arms around the neck of the widowed niece.

"Will my aunt receive me kindly?" asked Mrs. Newton, doubtfully.

"She will speak for herself."

"Who is it?" asked a voice, from the floor above. "Tell me quick, Jane."

"Go up," said Jane Barclay. "You will find your aunt."

At the head of the landing Mrs. Newton met the old lady.

"Have you forgiven me, aunt?" she said.

"It is Hester! Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the old lady, and she folded her niece in a close embrace. "Forgive you? It is for you to forgive me. I was a cross, disagreeable old woman, and I ought to have been ashamed of myself. Is that an answer?"

"I won't have you call yourself names, Aunt Eunice."

"Why did you never try to find me, Hester? That was unkind."

"I thought you were too deeply offended with me. Besides, I did not know where you lived. Elias Simmons told me you were dead, and died angry with me."

"Elias Simmons told you that?" exclaimed the old lady.

"Yes."

"When did he tell you?"

"Within a few months."

"Then he knew you were alive?"

"Yes."

"And your boy?"

"He is alive, and was once in the employ of Elias Simmons."

"Did Elias know he was your son?"

"He knew his name."

The old lady's face became stern.

"That man has been playing a double game," she said. "He told me that you were both dead—that you died some years since while on the way to San Francisco in a sailing vessel. He brought Capt. Williams to my lawyer to make affidavit to having commanded the ship at the time you and your boy died."

"But what could have been his object?"

"What could have been his object? Isn't it plain enough? He thought I would leave him all my property. He will find himself mistaken!"

The old lady nodded her head emphatically. It was clear that Elias had spoiled his prospects.

"And he has been pretending to hunt you up for me!" Miss Eunice went on, indignantly. "Did you ever hear of such perfidy?"

"I did not think the love of money would have made him stoop to such meanness."

"You don't know Elias! And he doesn't know me!" she added. "Had he tried to gratify me, and you had been restored to me through his efforts, I would freely have left him half my estate. I would even have given him a liberal slice of it before I died. Now—"

The hiatus was significant.

"You won't forget me, ma'am?" said Mrs. McCurdy, anxiously. "You know what you promised me."

"I never break my promises, Mrs. McCurdy; Jane, go up and get the wallet from my upper drawer."

Jane Barclay returned in a brief space of time.

Bridget McCurdy eyed the wallet as a hungry man eyes a good dinner.

"I sent to the bank for the money at once," said Miss Simmons. "I did not expect you would earn the reward so soon, but I meant to have it ready whenever it was wanted."

"You're a lady, ma'am!"

"And since you have been so prompt I shall increase the reward. This wallet contains a hundred and fifty dollars, Mrs. McCurdy, all which I cordially and gladly give you."

Bridget McCurdy's eyes sparkled.

"May you live a hundred years, ma'am," she ejaculated, raising her eyes in rapture, "and grow younger every day!"

"Thank you, Mrs. McCurdy. Less than that would carry me back to the days of my infancy, and I have no wish to go back so far as that."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Elias Simmons was sitting in his store on Fulton Street when a telegraph boy brought in a message. It ran thus:

"NEPHEW ELLIAS: Can you call at my house this afternoon? I wish to see you on business."

"EUNICE SIMMONS."

The merchant's face brightened up. He had felt doubtful as to the terms on which he stood with his aunt, but this seemed friendly, and a proof of renewed confidence.

"It's all right!" he said, to himself. "Aunt Eunice wants to consult me about some investment, or perhaps she is intending to change her will in my favor."

Seldom had Elias Simmons been so pleasant in his manner, and his clerks concluded that he had had a stroke of luck.

"I only hope it will continue," they thought. "The old man's been grouty so long that a change is desirable."

In fact, Elias Simmons had been deep in business troubles, due to attempting to carry on a business too large for his capital, and he was even then considering how he was to meet a note for fifteen hundred dollars which would fail due the next Monday.

Three o'clock found him ringing the bell at his aunt's door. Jane Barclay admitted him.

"I hope Aunt Eunice is well, Jane," he said, with his sweetest smile.

"She is quite well, Mr. Simmons," answered Jane, stiffly.

"I'll get rid of that old cat when I come into aunt's money," thought Elias. But he only smiled pleasantly on Jane, and asked in a tone of interest if she were well.

"Thank you, there's nothing the matter with me," she replied. "Please come upstairs to your aunt's room."

Mr. Simmons went upstairs in a very cheerful frame of mind.

"I wonder what Aunt Eunice is going to tell me?" he said, to himself. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if she is going to put some of her property into my hands to manage."

There was a smile upon his face as he opened the door of the old lady's sitting-room.

Miss Eunice was sitting in a large armchair, which her slight form did not begin to fill.

Elias hurried forward, and shook her hand fervently, saying: "My dear aunt, how well you are looking!"

"Thank you, Elias. Sit down. I want to speak to you on business."

"Just so! I am delighted with this mark of your confidence, Aunt Eunice."

"I am thinking of making a new will. Before doing so, I wish to ask you whether you are quite positive that Hester and her boy are dead."

"Unfortunately there is no doubt of it," said Elias.

"It is a great disappointment to me."

"And to me also, Aunt Eunice."

"You are of opinion that they died while on their way from New York to San Francisco?"

"Yes; such is the testimony of Capt. Williams, a most trustworthy man."

"And you have not seen Hester or her boy for years?" asked the old lady, fixing her sharp eyes on her nephew.

"I have not seen Hester, certainly. The boy I never saw."

Miss Eunice glanced significantly at Jane Barclay, who left the room.

"Though it would affect your interests, Elias, you would be glad if Hester and her son could come to life again?"

"Can you doubt it, aunt?"

"Then you shall have that pleasure."

What could his aunt mean? Elias Simmons asked himself this question in a bewildered way. He didn't have long to wonder. There was a sound of approaching steps, and Jane Barclay returned, followed by Mrs. Newton and Ned.

"Hester," said the old lady, "this is your cousin, Elias, whom you knew in earlier days. Ned, I shall have to introduce you, as Mr. Simmons says he never saw you."

Elias Simmons half arose from his chair, pale and panic-stricken. He sank back without a word to say.

"Hester, when did you meet Elias last?" asked Eunice Simmons.

"A few months since. He called upon me at my rooms."

"Did he say that I was in search of you?"

"No; he told me that you were dead."

"Edward, did you ever see Mr. Simmons before?"

"Yes, aunt. I worked for him at his store in Fulton Street."

"Did he know your name?"

"Yes."

Elias Simmons tried to think of something to say, but he was overwhelmed. Eunice Simmons turned to him, and said, sternly: "Your base attempt to prevent my meeting with Hester and her boy has recoiled upon yourself."

"Forgive me, aunt! I must have been mad!"

"I am afraid I shall find it hard to forgive you. I won't promise. You had better go away now. Next Monday you may call upon my lawyer, and receive my last communication."

Elias Simmons arose, and fairly sneaked out of the house. "Fool that I was!" he soliloquized, bitterly. "I might have had half—now I shall have nothing."

But it was not quite so bad as that. Miss Simmons through her lawyer agreed to give him five thousand dollars down if he would formally relinquish all future claims upon her estate. He could do no better, and agreed. This sum relieved him from embarrassment, and enabled him to put his business on a safe footing.

Mrs. Newton did not go to live with her aunt, but took a nice house near by, where Ned and Madge could live with her.

Ned left his place, and is attending a private school of a high grade, with the laudable purpose of obtaining a good education. Roscoe St. Clair has been set up, by Miss Simmons at Ned's request, in a small business on Sixth Avenue, and he recently had an application to take Leon Granville into his employ, Leon having been detected in pilfering small articles from the store of Mr. Simmons. Though very good-natured, St. Clair felt obliged to decline.

Eunice Simmons is stronger and better than she has been for some years. She has given fifty thousand dollars outright to Mrs. Newton and Ned.

"There's no knowing how long you'll have to wait for the rest, Hester," she says. "I have a great mind to live to a hundred."

Mrs. McCurdy has long since spent her hundred and fifty dollars, but Miss Simmons often gives her additional sums of money.

"She doesn't deserve it, Jane," says the old lady, "but it was she who brought together Hester and myself, and I can't refuse."

It is doubtful if Mrs. McCurdy will live to a hundred, for, besides being "wake and delicate," she has injured her constitution by the free use of whiskey.

Ned keeps up the intimacy with Fred Stanhope and his grandfather, and the two boys will probably be in the same class at Columbia College.

Ned has plenty of money now, and he is always ready to lend a helping hand to the boys whom he knew in his street-life days. He is not ashamed to speak of the time when he was poor like them, and blacked boots in front of the Astor House.

THE END.

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